

Master of Theology Thesis

Hearing Galatians Today in Light of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology of Freedom

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Introduction

In 2010 Eric Metaxas released the bibliography *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* which quickly became a *New York Times* best seller. This gives testament to the fact that Dietrich Bonhoeffer has become one of the most respected and read theologians by evangelicals from the last century.¹ There are many facets of this man that draw us to him. For example, his courageous stand against Hitler and National Socialism in his native Germany, and ultimately his execution at their hands in 1945, has many proclaiming him as a modern-day martyr. He was also a committed pastor whose works *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* provide insight into his deep pastoral concern and spiritual vision for the Christian community. These books have especially been received by evangelicals with open arms. Bonhoeffer also pursues a thoroughly Christological approach to truth and is committed to the Christian scriptures in a way that is foundational to the life of the church. We also are able to gain insight into his humanity from his published personal letters in which we see his inner struggles and profound wrestling with the place and shape of the church in his day and in the future. However, Bonhoeffer's principle vocation was as a theologian.² His theology was not one of speculation and the idealism that had characterised enlightenment theology; Bonhoeffer sought after a concrete theology that spoke into the everyday life of the church and its responsibility within the world.³ Because of his untimely death, his later writings come to us uncompleted, such as his famous *Ethics* manuscripts. However, there is sufficient continuity within the manuscripts to grasp his rich theological insights. These insights provide a respected and important voice that the evangelical church needs to hear today.

¹ Timothy Larsen, "The Evangelical Reception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 46.

² Philip G. Ziegler, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Theologian of the Word of God," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 17.

³ Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larsen, "Introduction," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 15.

This thesis will follow the lead of many recent Bonhoeffer scholars who seek to “appropriate Bonhoeffer’s theology constructively in order to engage contemporary questions.”⁴ When focusing on Bonhoeffer I will primarily be using the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works library and other secondary source literature limited to that written in, or translated into, English. The contemporary question we will be discussing is that of freedom. Put more precisely, what is freedom for the Christian today? The today for our purposes is the twenty-first century evangelical church. In the process of the thesis we will be discussing Martin Luther’s *The Freedom of the Christian* in respect to how Bonhoeffer stands upon and moves beyond his tradition’s founder. We also will spend considerable time hearing Galatians, the Pauline epistle of freedom, as Bonhoeffer helps us to apprehend it in all its fullness.

Why do we need to ask the question of freedom? I suggest that the idea of freedom today, which takes on many forms in current culture, is found theologically wanting. For one, freedom can be considered the absence of oppressive force or rule. People are set free from slavery or oppressive ideas like Communism (which is not, of course, a bad thing). Alternatively, freedom can be considered the ability to choose and act without any outside interference or necessity. This is a freedom of personal choice. For example, the decision to abort an unborn human being is considered a free choice. What is the church’s response to this kind of freedom that is founded in autonomy?

Nearly five hundred years ago Martin Luther protested against the idea that humanity could earn salvation through works and religious indulgences. Through faith, he argued, Christians are set free from the need to merit God’s favour and are actually free for life in response to God’s grace. However, depending on who you

⁴ Ibid., 14.

were in society at that time, this freedom meant very different things. For the Roman Catholics, Luther's freedom meant the destruction of the church; for the peasants, it was an opportunity to revolt against rulers and landowners; for others it meant freedom from church law. Our contemporary culture proclaims and protects the freedom of religion and speech. And of course, an oppressive force should not stop people from choosing to believe in God or the ability to share their opinion. There is also the spiritual freedom experienced and celebrated amongst the African American slaves of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whilst under horrible physical circumstances. As we can see, the idea of freedom can mean many different things to many different people.

The recurring theme is that contemporary Western culture's idea of freedom is found in the ability to be free *from* something or someone else. The individual is, or should be, free to make their own choices without outside influence. This type of freedom is a thoroughly autonomous freedom. In the epistle to the Galatians Paul tells the church, "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another" (Gal 5:13).⁵ Building upon Paul's vision, Bonhoeffer develops a theology of "freedom for" based upon the freedom of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The key word here is *for*. Bonhoeffer proposes a "freedom for" as opposed to a "freedom from." In *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer claims that "freedom is a relation between two persons."⁶ This statement is radically at odds with the freedom that is proclaimed and celebrated today in the West. Freedom is no longer at the center of the autonomous human being but actually exists in the midst of relationship. Bonhoeffer argues that, "In the language of the bible freedom is not something that

⁵ All biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, vol. 3 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett et al. 17 vols (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995-2014), 63. Hereafter DBWE.

people have for themselves but something they have for others.”⁷ It is Bonhoeffer’s rich account of “freedom for” that I suggest would be of great use to the evangelical church today, and will help us to hear afresh Paul’s call to a free life in his epistle to the Galatians.

To begin we will spend a chapter delineating Bonhoeffer’s view of ultimate reality. Ultimate reality for Bonhoeffer is the reality of God revealed in the present person Jesus Christ. This is a foundational aspect of Bonhoeffer’s thought that we will need to grasp to fully understand his view of freedom. There is no room for anthropocentric ideas with Bonhoeffer; Jesus Christ is definitive of ultimate reality. He is the center of everything and has brought all things together in himself. Chapter two will focus on the way Bonhoeffer draws from and moves beyond Martin Luther. Bonhoeffer cites Luther more than any other theologian⁸ and encouraged his students that in times of confusion they should go back and read Luther.⁹ We will utilise Luther’s famous monograph *The Freedom of the Christian* that surely was aimed at bringing some kind of agreement on the idea of freedom during a time of great turmoil and confusion. Chapter three will provide a thorough view of Bonhoeffer’s “freedom for” by discussing the freedom of God in relation to the freedom of humanity. We will see that freedom is based on God being free “for” human beings in Jesus Christ and experienced concretely by the Christian who is being formed by the Spirit into the present person of Christ. For this we will focus on his *Ethics* manuscript “History and Good [2]” from the English translations of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works series. We will find that freedom’s counterpart is responsibility; namely, freedom *in* responsible action. Chapters four and five are devoted to hearing Galatians afresh in dialogue with Bonhoeffer’s account of

⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁸ Philip G. Ziegler, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Theologian of the Word of God,” in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 23.

⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 435.

“freedom for” and J. Louis Martyn’s recent ground-breaking commentary on Paul’s apocalyptic epistle. One of the main themes of Galatians is the freedom of the Christian expressed in the biblical language of justification.¹⁰ By exploring Bonhoeffer’s concrete account of “freedom for” I hope to provide a view to how it helps us hear Paul’s letter to the Galatians in all its fullness today. What we will discover is that freedom is located relationally as human beings live in obedience to the command of God revealed in Jesus Christ who is *for* others.

The final chapter discusses freedom for the Christian today in light of our reading of Galatians in dialogue with Bonhoeffer. We want to align with and expound upon Bonhoeffer’s prophetic vision and attempt “a new language, perhaps quite nonreligious language, but liberating and redeeming like Jesus’s language, so that people will be alarmed and yet overcome by its power.”¹¹ The freedom of the Christian must be one that speaks to the world because it is a freedom given *for* the world in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it is a question not of religion, but of humanity, because a Christian person is a witness to, and participant in, the new humanity made real in and through Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer says, “Being a Christian does not mean being religious in a certain way... Instead it means being human.”¹² What I hope to articulate, with Bonhoeffer’s help, is a view of freedom that helps the church today live more authentically as human beings before God and for the world.

¹⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 98.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 390.

¹² *Ibid.*, 480.

Chapter 1. Bonhoeffer and Ultimate Reality

Reality and Freedom

There is a long history in Western thought in regard to the topic of the real. The basic questions of the early Greek philosophers were centered around explaining the world within which we live and what is real.¹³ What is the “thing” from which our experience in the world comes from? Is there a basic element of reality? And if we know the one “thing” how do we account for the change we experience? Many of these thinkers were monist in that they believed there was one “thing” behind everything, however they were not necessarily theist. For the early pioneer Thales, the answer was to be found, not in the myths of the gods, but within the world itself.¹⁴ Over hundreds of years the early philosophers searched for the ultimate “thing.” Their ideas were not just isolated academic exercises, these ideas informed how life was lived within the world and helped shape politics, religion, ethics, and science.

Our understanding of what is ultimately real eventually shapes how we live as human beings within the world. Two Greek philosophers whose theories have undoubtedly shaped Western history to a great extent are Plato and Aristotle.¹⁵ Plato argues that true reality exists in an invisible world of forms. These forms exist outside of our experience but are real to human beings as copies. A common example used to explain this theory of reality is that of a triangle. There exists a metaphysical form of a triangle that is perfect and real, however what we experience in the world is a copy that shares aspects of the real. Everything we know in our

¹³ W.T. Jones, *The Classical Mind: A History of Western Philosophy I*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 216.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108. Jones suggests that we are all “more or less Platonists.” He even argues that Aristotle “was fundamentally and acknowledgedly a Platonist, and his work can be understood only as an effort to reformulate the insights of Plato.” See *Ibid.*, 215.

experience in the world is a copy or imitation of the truly real form in the metaphysical realm. Aristotle, following on from Plato's theory of forms, attempted to bring both worlds together. If the early Greek Philosophers tried to find the real in the material world, and Plato located the real in another world, Aristotle positioned the real as ideal forms but *within* the material world. For example, the triangle I draw has the "substance" of the real *triangle*, that which makes it a triangle. Universals still exist, however, they do not exist "out there" somewhere as a perfect form, but within the actual instance of the "thing." Simply, all triangles are triangles and similar because the universal triangle exists in all triangles. For Aristotle, a "things" form can change but the "things" substance endures.

There is no doubt that the ideas of both Plato and Aristotle have had a great influence in Christian theology¹⁶ which we will not be able to explore in depth. However, for our purposes we need to ask how they have influenced our view on reality and being human within the world? If real human being is an "idea" or ideal "substance" then how do we grasp it? And if the world is not truly real then should it not be rejected in the pursuit of true reality? In a very basic assessment, what these ideas have done is create a divide between the real and the world, between what is true and our experience of what is true.

In more recent history we find other influential ideas on reality coming from philosophers like René Descartes (known as the father of modern Western philosophy) and Immanuel Kant. Descartes is possibly most famous for his saying, "I think, therefore I am." The primary thing we can know, he suggested, is that we think, therefore everything else must be proved via autonomous reason. As a result, reality, and the source of knowledge, became anthropocentric. Kant went a step

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 201-202.

further and synthesised the divide between the rationalist and empiricist approach by placing reality as a relationship between the pre-deposited necessary structures of the human mind and our external experiences. Reality, therefore, must conform to the human mind. The result was that human knowledge of reality was found via human reason and essentially anthropocentric. As human beings we became the center of our own worlds, and therefore, for our purposes, human freedom becomes an *ideal* to be found within and experienced anthropocentrically. By the twentieth century this approach to the real had been widely accepted as an epistemological foundation.¹⁷

The ascetic trends in Christian history are examples of the rejection of the world in the pursuit of an ideal. The heart behind such movements are not impure at the least, however, they assume that the concrete experience of the world must be rejected to obtain spiritual heights. At this point it would be helpful to explain what we mean by “the world.” For the purpose of our study we align with Bonhoeffer’s mature view of the world as that which God has created and redeemed through Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world...” is the sense in which we will proceed. For Bonhoeffer, true human being is living by faith “in the full this-worldliness of life.”¹⁸ This means the daily life of human beings living in the world before God, who, through the Son, has redeemed the world. Yet the scriptures also present the world as being tainted by evil and acting against the work of God. We can have a love for the world which is at enmity with God “because it arises from the essence of the world in itself and not from God’s love for the world.”¹⁹ We do not wish to deny the effects of sin in the world that work against the purposes of God, and we will

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 47-48, Bonhoeffer argues that the human question of being and doing good, therefore the question of human ethics, has presumed that ultimate reality is located in “the self and the world.”

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 486

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 66.

discuss this later, however, as we will see, God has aligned the world with his purposes through the destruction of sin in the person of Jesus Christ. This has been achieved because God, in Jesus Christ, was willing to suffer for the sake of the world by taking upon himself the sin of the world. And so, the followers of Jesus also enter fully into the world and share in his suffering as the body of Christ.²⁰ My point here is that inherited philosophical undercurrents can place the Christian in an ethical dualism between the world in which we live and the spiritual life found in Christ.

The reliance on human reason as the epistemological foundation also led to a deconstructive approach to the interpretation of scripture that has eventually eroded its authority to speak into the world and the church. The search for the Historical Jesus is an example of human beings approaching God from an anthropocentric direction that eventually leaves us with very little to hold on too. What then can we know and believe? The evangelical church is at war within itself when it comes to the truth of scripture. Kevin Vanhoozer, in a paper that canvases this issue well, states, "We are in a crisis situation, in a labyrinth of language, at the crossroads of truth and interpretation. To paraphrase Barth: as Christian theologians, we *must* speak of truth; as denizens of the twenty-first century post-Enlightenment west, we *cannot* speak of truth."²¹ When it comes to the truth in scripture today we get lost in a myriad of voices. However, in 1919 Karl Barth created a shift (or we could argue a return) towards an epistemology of revelation with the publication of his famous commentary on the epistle to the Romans. Bonhoeffer follows Barth's lead and develops an epistemological foundation which is profoundly different to what we have so far discussed. It is the present person of Christ who, for Bonhoeffer, reveals the true reality from which flows human being and true creaturely freedom.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 480.

²¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.1 (March 2005): 91.

Christology as Epistemological Foundation

For Bonhoeffer, Jesus Christ is the revelation of the Creator God who alone is ultimate reality.²² Bonhoeffer argues for an epistemology grounded in revelation. In other words, the historical event of the incarnation, of God the Son becoming human, is the revelation upon which all knowledge rests. Bonhoeffer states, “Nothing can be known about [either] God or human being, until God has become a human being in Jesus Christ.”²³ For Bonhoeffer, the pursuit of reality from any other avenue is ultimately fruitless. Jesus Christ revealed is the center of all knowledge because He is the very Word of God to humanity.²⁴ What the anthropocentric philosophies mentioned above have failed to recognise is that “in the beginning God created.” The presupposition of this revelation is that God is the ultimate reality, and that he has made himself known in the person of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer is clear that asking probing questions beyond what has been revealed is unhelpful. Paraphrasing Luther, he candidly notes, “Luther was once asked what God was doing before the creation of the world. His answer was that God was cutting sticks to cane people who ask such idle questions.”²⁵ The point is that God’s revelation to human beings is something that creatures cannot get behind or deconstruct. For Bonhoeffer, we are not able to question revelation, or dig behind it; we must accept it in faith as the witness to the truth. All knowledge comes “from above,” not visa-versa. The “from above” revelation of God who is ultimate reality is the epistemological source. And everything we need to know about the supernatural and transcendent Creator, who is far beyond the ability of his creatures to grasp, is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. God, in Jesus Christ, moves “from above,” taking into himself humanity and the world in the incarnation. In our desire to understand Bonhoeffer’s view of Christian freedom one must first accept that God is

²² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 48.

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin:1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 352.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 301.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3, 31.

the ultimate reality, and that this ultimate reality is revealed in the person Jesus Christ.²⁶

Much of the historical Christological discussion has been focused around Christ's ontology. How is the real (that being God) and the world (that being creation) joined in the person of Jesus Christ? Bonhoeffer is not interested in this type of "how" Christology. These questions cannot find the real Jesus Christ because they are founded upon fallen human reason, and Christ is a person only known through his own self-revelation. Bonhoeffer is not distracted by ideas about Christ; rather, he pursues the concrete revelation that comes "from above" as the revelation of the Creator to the creature. Here Bonhoeffer deals a death blow to the approaches of the enlightenment that allowed knowledge to become autonomous and human reason the epistemological foundation. True knowledge is only available because God, who is ultimate reality, has revealed himself to his creation in Jesus Christ. This revelation births, not the question of "how?" but the question of "who?" Put more precisely, "who are you Jesus Christ?"²⁷ And Christ Himself provides the answer because he does not just bring revelation, he *is* revelation.²⁸ The Creator does not speak his word through Christ, Christ *is* the Word.²⁹ Jesus Christ does not just reveal truth, he *is the* Truth. Jesus Christ, for Bonhoeffer, is wholly God, revealed towards the human being, and wholly human. Bonhoeffer speaks of Jesus Christ as the "counter logos" that stands against the human logos. In Bonhoeffer's words, "there can be no authority for our human logos to cast doubt on the truth of this Logos. Jesus's own witness to himself, then and now, stands on its own and substantiates itself."³⁰ The cognitive reason of fallen humanity is totally dethroned before the concrete

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 48-49.

²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 302.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 317.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

revelation of Jesus Christ. There is no room here for compromise. The human logos falls silent or it rises up and kills the Logos of God. "There are only two possibilities," Bonhoeffer says, "when a human being confronts Jesus: the human being must either die or kill Jesus."³¹ This is the weight that Bonhoeffer places on the "from above" revelation of Ultimate Reality in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the center of all knowledge.³² The importance of understanding Bonhoeffer's Christology cannot be understated. It is arguably the very core of his theology and informs every aspect of his thought.

We must note that Bonhoeffer's Christology is not idealist but personal. The revelation of ultimate reality to humanity *is the person* Jesus Christ who comes as the Word of God. Jesus Christ is not just a historical figure we deconstruct in order to find his "substance." He is not a great teacher and ideal moralist we honour and imitate. He is the Creator made manifest (in fact, humiliated) within his creation for the sake of creation. This means that ultimate reality is inherently relational. We know only of reality as revealed relationally in Jesus Christ to humanity. Reality is not located in another world or anthropocentrically; reality is located in a relationship. And this relationship is between the Creator and the creature to whom the person of Jesus Christ is revealed. For the purpose of our study it must be clear that, for Bonhoeffer, Christian freedom is Christological and relational. If all knowledge is centred in Christ then the question of freedom will find its answer revealed in the incarnated, humiliated, and resurrected person of Jesus Christ.

When speaking of ethics, Bonhoeffer states, "The source of a Christian ethic is not the reality of one's own self, not the reality of the world, nor is it the reality of norms

³¹ *Ibid.*, 307.

³² *Ibid.*, 301.

and values. It is the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ.”³³ In other words, how a human being acts in the world flows from the revealed reality of Jesus Christ as opposed to ethical laws or timeless truths derived from human reason. In Bonhoeffer’s view, ethics in the Protestant tradition has been “firmly under the spell of antiquity without being aware of the fact.”³⁴ The church has allowed the false views of reality developed in the Western philosophical tradition to influence our ethical lives within the world. The church-community, however, is called to live in a way that aligns with ultimate reality. For “[s]ince the appearance of Christ, ethics can be concerned with only one thing: to partake in the reality of the fulfilled will of God.”³⁵ For Bonhoeffer, if our ethical action is concerned with the choice between good and evil it has become something concerned with the penultimate. When operating from the penultimate we create a law from which we live, or a method to avoid sin and be good. The new humanity is different because it is grounded in the ultimate. Bonhoeffer argues that the anthropocentric and idealistic approach to “the ethical as something formal, universally valid, and rational [has] inevitably led to the complete atomisation of human community and individual life, to unbound subjectivism and individualism.”³⁶ The correction is to leave behind the anthropocentric approach and rest upon the concrete revelation of Jesus Christ as the ultimate and therefore the sole authorisation for anything ethical. Our concern is Jesus Christ revealed as the actual Word of God to humanity. This will of God is not “something hidden or unfulfilled,” it is “what has been revealed and fulfilled.”³⁷

Christian ethics is situated in the person of Jesus Christ. We can say the same for Christian freedom, for as we will discuss later, the true Christian ethic for Bonhoeffer

³³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 265.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 373.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

is a unique relationship between responsibility and freedom before God and the other. Therefore, if we are to be concerned with the freedom of the Christian, it places this demand upon us as voiced by Bonhoeffer:

With what reality will we reckon in our life? With the reality of God's revelatory word or with the so-called realities of life? With divine grace or with earthly inadequacies? With the resurrection or with death? This question itself, which none can answer by their own choice without answering it falsely, already presupposes a given answer: that God, however we decide, has already spoken the revelatory word and that we, even in our false reality, can live no other way than from the true reality of the word of God.³⁸

Ultimate reality is revealed through no ability of our own, only by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. What we are concerned with as Christians is actually "God's reality revealed in Christ becoming real among God's creatures."³⁹ The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is an invitation into *real* life. And freedom is related to our action within and for God's reality becoming real in the world. As Bonhoeffer states, "*reality* is first and last not something impersonal, but the *Real One*, namely, the God who became human."⁴⁰ Trying to live and act within an understanding of reality without reference to the person of Jesus Christ means living in a false reality. The way the evangelical church views reality needs to align, not with the philosophical idealism mentioned above, but with the concrete revelation of Jesus Christ. We will now turn to understand more of "who" Jesus Christ reveals himself to be as the center and source of all knowledge and reality.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 261-262. Italics original.

Reality Understood: Who is Jesus Christ Revealed?

We have seen that reality for Bonhoeffer is not found in the ideal, the world or the self; ultimate reality is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. This does not mean then that the world and the self are to be rejected in favour of ultimate reality. It means we see the self and the world as brought into relationship with ultimate reality through faith in Jesus Christ who is *pro-me* and for the world.⁴¹ Christ has acted to bring these things into alignment with ultimate reality; that is, into alignment with himself. In the incarnation we see God in Christ taking humanity into himself in an act of love towards his creation. In the cross we see God in Christ taking on the burden of sin and restoring all things unto himself. In the resurrection we see God in Christ conquering death and initiating a new creation under a new Adam. God is not separated from his creation, or lost within it. God, as the ultimate reality, has entered into creation, and draws everything into true reality, as revealed in Jesus Christ, the center of everything.⁴² In Bonhoeffer's words, "In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world."⁴³

We are led to ask, precisely *who* is Christ revealed? Firstly, this revelation of Jesus Christ is *pro-me*. Bonhoeffer goes as far as to say that "The very core of [Jesus'] person is *pro-me*."⁴⁴ This *pro-me* position of Jesus Christ is seen clearly through the incarnation of the Son as wholly human, culminating with the crucifixion in our place, and made available in the present because of his resurrection.⁴⁵ The entire movement of Jesus Christ is from the Father and for humanity. Jesus came into the world to reveal himself to human beings for *our* sake, vicariously. Indeed, Bonhoeffer goes further than just saying "Christ died for me." For Bonhoeffer, "The being of

⁴¹ Christ being for the world is discussed by Bonhoeffer in *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 64-67.

⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 324.

⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 54.

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 314.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

Christ's person is essentially relatedness to me. His being-Christ is his being-for-me."⁴⁶ This radical picture of Christ means we can only speak of Christ as being for us, as *pro-me*.

To expand this further, Bonhoeffer sees three ways that this Christological *pro-me* structure affects us.⁴⁷ For one, Jesus Christ is the head of the new community. He is the second Adam and the first born over the new creation. For another, he stands in the place of this new humanity before God, taking our place under the judgement of God. This is not, as Bonhoeffer says, Christ acting "for" the new humanity, but rather "as" the new humanity before God. Jesus Christ represents humanity before God vicariously. And lastly, because Christ stands as the new humanity he is *in* it just as the new humanity is *in* him. It is in the person of Christ that God judges and pardons the new humanity. The very person of Jesus Christ, historically and present, in his very essence, is *pro-me*. What this means is that the person of Jesus Christ, who now stands as the new humanity, directs himself towards the Other and others. Plainly put, Jesus Christ exists for the Father and others.

Secondly, the church-community is the body of Christ and therefore exists for others just as Christ exists for others. One of Bonhoeffer's most impactful statements has been "The church is church only when it is there for others."⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer challenges the idea that the church-community is called out of the world and set against the world. Too often the church has become inward focused, engaging in a fight for its own survival, as if we believe the churches existence in the world depended on us. Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology turns this approach upside down. The church is initiated by, and belongs to, God. The church-community is not to be seen as separate from

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 503.

the world, but as a space where Christ is shown to encompass the whole world and “reveals its ultimate foundation.”⁴⁹ The church-community is the concrete space where ultimate reality is witnessed. The church “believes in the reality of being accepted by God” and this acceptance is not isolated and focused on selected individuals; rather, it “belongs to the whole world.”⁵⁰

The church must take on the posture of Christ towards the world which is one of being *for* the world.⁵¹ The church shares in the *pro-me* structure of Christ because the church is the body of Christ. God unites human beings to Himself in Christ as the church-community. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, Christ takes His present form *as* church-community.⁵² The Pauline body of Christ “is not a mere *image*: the church-community *is* the body of Christ. It is so in reality.”⁵³ Christ is *present* now as the church-community. It is not that we are absorbed into Christ or that He is absorbed into humanity, but that through the incarnation humanity and God are united in the one person of Christ. This is a spiritual reality and is witnessed presently and concretely as the community of Christ. In other words, the church-community exists as Jesus Christ present.

We would be mistaken here if we thought Bonhoeffer is pushing the present concreteness of Christ into the realm of the sacred over and against the secular. This is not the case. For Bonhoeffer, “Following Jesus... [has] to be lived out in the midst of the world.”⁵⁴ There is one reality and that is Jesus Christ, the revealed ultimate reality. Within ultimate reality the sacred and the secular lose their boundaries and

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵² Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*: DBWE 12, 323.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 48.

become one under the lordship of Christ.⁵⁵ The church-community, however, does exist in its own space within the world. In this space the church-community operates as a witness to the ultimate reality in which the world actually exists, irrespective of whether the world believes it or not. Christ is present specifically *within* the community and *as* the community, and this community is present *for* the world. And so the present body of Christ, which is those called to participate in the being of Christ, live in the world and for the world. The community is the salt of the earth and a light on a hill (Matt 5:13-16).⁵⁶ It is this in reality because it is what God has made it in Christ. This gracious gift of community is participation in the being of Jesus Christ that is present here and now. It is a relationship with God seen in "a new life in 'being there for others,' through participation in the being of Jesus."⁵⁷ The church-community belongs to Christ and is shaped by Christ. The Christian lives daily within the community, dying to themselves, and living responsibly before God and towards one another. For Bonhoeffer, this is a space where the reality of God becomes concretely real in the world.

We see clearly here, that for Bonhoeffer, there is only one reality and that is the ultimate reality of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. There is no space that is not brought into this ultimate reality. There cannot be two separate realities. There cannot be a reality that we can leave, and then enter another. Bonhoeffer argues that, "The whole reality of the world has already been drawn into and is held together in Christ."⁵⁸ This encompasses every area of human life: past, present, and future. The Christ reality unites everything, except of course sin and death. For "[i]n Christ we

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 57-58.

⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer comments on this passage in Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 110-114.

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 501.

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 58. Bonhoeffer continues, "As long as Christ and the world are conceived as two realms bumping against and repelling each other, we are left with only the following options. Giving up on reality as a whole, either we place ourselves in one of the two realms, wanting Christ without the world or the world without Christ - and in both cases we deceive ourselves."

are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, the one not without the other.”⁵⁹ In so saying, Bonhoeffer negates the Platonic and Aristotelian ideas that have influenced Christian thought historically in a way that created separation of the ideal and material, the sacred and secular.

That leads us to an important question regarding the existence of sin, evil, or the kingdom of the devil, which stand opposed to the kingdom of God. For Bonhoeffer ultimate reality stands *over* this division as opposed to against it. Even if we were to see the world as engaged in a supernatural and cosmic battle between God and the devil it remains true that “the kingdom of the devil is always only under the feet of Christ.”⁶⁰ If a human being decides to reject the command of God, listening instead to the voice of the devil, it does not dissolve the fact the world is still God’s and all whom are in it (cf. Ps 24:1). Adam and Eve turned against the command of God in response to the whispering lie of the devil, but this did not stop God from being God. Bonhoeffer states, “The world is not divided between Christ and the devil; it is completely the world of Christ, whether it recognises this or not.”⁶¹ Jesus Christ took upon himself the evil of the world in the cross event (2 Cor 5:21). Christ became sin and destroyed the power of sin over the world (Rom 6:1-14). This is the scope of ultimate reality as revealed in Christ.

We have seen a thoroughly Christological delineation of reality here in answer to the question “who are you Jesus Christ?” The human being does not choose ultimate reality. We cannot step out of our sinful state through careful use of reason and discover the ultimate reality into which we attempt to live. In the “from above” theology of Bonhoeffer, the one who is Ultimate Reality chooses to reveal himself.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

For ultimate reality is not something we enter into or receive, we are already within it whether we realise it or not. This revelation of ultimate reality is the *present person* of Jesus Christ *as* the church-community that is *pro-me* and *for the world*.

The Concretism of Ultimate Reality

Bonhoeffer is ultimately not concerned with ideas. He seeks a concrete theology that is real in the world we live. Theology for Bonhoeffer was not solely an academic exercise. He wants to know what being Christian means for everyday life? Or in his words, “who is Christ actually for us today?”⁶² For Bonhoeffer, Christ is present today as the church-community and also in the church-community through the sacrament, sermon, and sociality.⁶³ The words of the preacher become the words of Christ and the elements of the sacrament become the body of Christ in a very real way for Bonhoeffer. It is here that God is present concretely through the Word addressed to the church-community.⁶⁴ And because Christ is present, the Word spoken does not come as ideals and timeless truths; instead, the Word speaks to real people in real situations. The Word does not reveal the Word, the Word *is* the Word. To say it differently, Jesus does not reveal or teach the command of God, he *is* the command of God in his very person that calls and forms his church-community.

Likewise, because Jesus commanded that the sacraments be remembered they are indicative of his presence. His command and his person cannot be separated. Bonhoeffer warns us not to revert to asking the question “how” this is so, we only ask “who” is the One revealed. For Bonhoeffer, it is the humiliation of Jesus Christ that enables his person to be present. He *is* the Word of God and *in* human words at

⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 362.

⁶³ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 315.

⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer details the relationship between the Word of God and the human word, and Christ's presence in the sacraments in his lectures on Christology, See *ibid.*, 315-323.

the same time because he is the God-human. In the same way, he is the creator of bread and wine, and also the new creation *in* the bread and wine for the community. Christ is contemporary with the church in that he is active presently forming and shaping the church into himself through the Spirit.⁶⁵ The contemporaneity of Christ refuses to allow Christ to become just an influential force or an ideal removed from history.⁶⁶ Christ is present and active now because of his historical incarnation, humiliation, and resurrection. These however are not just historical occurrences. Because they reveal reality they are enduring in the sense that Christ is present as the incarnated, humiliated and resurrected God-man. There is no room for the divide between a supposed Jesus of history and a present Christ. No, Christ is present and active, calling and forming the church into that which he “is and is now doing.”⁶⁷

Christ is also present in the sociality of the Christian community. This is lived out both vertically, in our life before God, and horizontally, in our life towards the other. For Bonhoeffer, if ultimate reality is the entire world reconciled in Christ, then we can only approach one another through Christ, and therefore we can only act towards one another in Christ. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, our action towards the “other” is also action towards God. He states, “We are not allowed to separate God from our sister or brother.”⁶⁸ As people in Christ we are also called to be Christ to others. The “other” is only found in Christ as “I” am only found in Christ. We can only see each other as someone called, forgiven, and alive in Christ. When we do this we become bearers of God’s Word and “bringers of the message of salvation” to each other.⁶⁹ We are thus concerned with acting in a way that aligns with the reality of God for that person which ultimately is reconciliation and participation in Christ.

⁶⁵ See Christopher R. J. Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 104-105.

⁶⁶ Matt Jenson, “Real Presence: Contemporaneity in Bonhoeffer’s Christology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58.2 (2005): 148.

⁶⁷ Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, 95.

⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 123.

⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayer Book of the Bible*, DBWE 5, 32.

To be in Christ also means to partake in the cross. The importance of the cross for Bonhoeffer's theology of community cannot be understated. To be in Christ is to take up our cross and die to our selfish desires and seek only the will of God at any cost. In fact, Bonhoeffer claims that Christ's presence is a cruciform presence.⁷⁰ To be found in Christ entails participation in the cross. In other words, to die to self and live towards others. The new life made possible in the human person who humbly dies before the command of God is "participation in the being of Jesus."⁷¹ Human action towards one another in the church-community is characterised by dying to self and being alive in Christ towards each other. As each person takes up their cross in Christ they approach other cross bearers in mutual humility before Christ. We are called to die so that we may truly live. The cross defines community life and is the foundation of our relating to one another within the community. We can approach and act towards one another only because we have first died to ourselves and are now found in Christ. This is the concrete revealed reality in which the church-community is called to live. And here the church-community is found as the present reality of God on earth.

Bonhoeffer also speaks of the divine mandates as space in the world where Jesus Christ is experienced concretely; namely the spaces that are the church, marriage and family, culture, and government.⁷² These mandates are given by God as organising structures for the world that come under the ultimate reality of Jesus Christ revealed. Even if these mandates don't specifically recognise the authority of Jesus Christ they still come under his lordship (cf. Rom 13:1). This is Bonhoeffer's way of saying that ultimate reality encompasses all of life.⁷³ And so, we can say that the concreteness of

⁷⁰ Jens Zimmermann, "Reading the Book of the Church: Bonhoeffer's Christological Hermeneutics," *Modern Theology* 28.4 (Oct 2012): 775.

⁷¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 501.

⁷² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 388.

⁷³ See Christopher Holmes, "The Indivisible Whole of God's Reality: On the Agency of Jesus in Bonhoeffer's Ethics," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12.3 (2010): 289.

ultimate reality encompasses all of the world, and therefore all aspects of everyday life. The Christian is not called to some idealistic and other-worldly expression of pious ethical life, but “rather the completely ordinary, everyday, regular, unobtrusive behaviour [as] the sign of genuine obedience and genuine humility.”⁷⁴ It is living within the revealed ultimate reality of the contemporaneous Christ which encompasses the entire world and is witnessed in the church-community. This is a concrete occurrence because Christ is present in our daily living and real relationships. Christ is present in the congregational life of the church-community. It is upon this reality that we can understand and experience the real freedom that Christ offers. And this is what God is doing in Christ. Bonhoeffer states, “the will of God is nothing other than the realisation of the Christ-reality among us and in our world... a reality that wills to become real ever anew.”⁷⁵

We began this chapter looking through a wide lens at the philosophies that have shaped our culture’s current view on reality and subsequently human freedom. We have ended up focused on the revealed present person of Jesus Christ *in* and *as* the church-community, *within* and *for* the world. It is clear that Bonhoeffer offers a comprehensive Christological epistemology of revelation from the Creator to the creature. It is from this understanding of Jesus Christ revealed that we can begin to delineate the freedom of the Christian. This freedom, however, although experienced by the Christian within the community, will take on the form of Christ as being for the neighbour and the world. Before we delve into Bonhoeffer’s “freedom for” we will spend the next chapter with Luther upon whose account of freedom Bonhoeffer heavily relies.

⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 147.

⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 74.

Chapter 2. Luther's Legacy on The Freedom of the Christian

Luther and Bonhoeffer

In the previous chapter we gained an understanding of Bonhoeffer's view of ultimate reality as the revealed and present person of Jesus Christ. We saw that human action and being rest upon this Christocentric epistemological foundation. In this chapter we will focus on Martin Luther's famous 1520 tract *The Freedom of the Christian* that influenced the motif of freedom in Bonhoeffer's theology. As a Lutheran pastor and theologian, it is little wonder that Bonhoeffer relied upon his tradition's founding father. Nathan Montover, in his article tellingly titled "From Luther to Bonhoeffer: A Clear Line", states that, "Luther provided the conceptual basis of Bonhoeffer's ethical thought."⁷⁶ An understanding of Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom requires us to grasp Luther's legacy on the subject, both in an ethical and theological sense.

Bonhoeffer read Luther differently than many during his time, or in the four hundred years that separated them. We clearly see in *Discipleship* that Bonhoeffer blames the incorrect interpretation and misuse of Luther as creating the "cheap grace" that he felt had permeated the twentieth-century Lutheran church.⁷⁷ In fact, Klemens von Klemperer suggests that Bonhoeffer's decision to return to Germany in 1935 from the security of England was partly to save Luther from "ignomy."⁷⁸ What was it that allowed Bonhoeffer to discover the "real" Luther? It was due, as Klemperer explains, to "Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the otherness of God and man's need for grace."⁷⁹ The enlightenment had in many ways domesticated God and

⁷⁶ Nathan Montover, "From Luther to Bonhoeffer: A Clear Line," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 40.5 (2013): 355.

⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 49-56.

⁷⁸ Klemens von Klemperer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Resistance against National Socialism," *Pro Ecclesia* 6.2 (Spring 1997): 191-192.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

placed Him at the service of human reason and critical biblical study. The individual human being had become the center of knowledge. The shift initiated by Barth's attention to the "otherness" of God, to which Bonhoeffer aligned himself in part, allowed him to read Luther through a different lens.⁸⁰ The emphasis on God's otherness reveals the total depravity of humanity which underscores Luther's tract on freedom as we shall see. There is little doubt that Bonhoeffer's rediscovery of Luther greatly influenced his theology and therefore his delineation of responsible freedom.

Another reason to discuss Luther in tandem with Bonhoeffer is to guard against misunderstanding Bonhoeffer's nuanced thoughts. Bonhoeffer has been received in all sorts of manner in the English speaking evangelical church.⁸¹ For one, Bonhoeffer's later writings are fragmented and unfinished due to his untimely death, leaving many thoughts unfinished and open to misunderstanding. There was also a language barrier requiring the translation of complex ideas and vocabulary. This sometimes added confusion to his theological intentions and direction. Only recently has the English speaking world been blessed with a comprehensive translation of Bonhoeffer's entire corpus from world acclaimed scholars enabling a more unified starting point for understanding his thought. Problems also arose from the "backwards" reading of Bonhoeffer where his more abstract ideas in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, which were published and discussed before his other writings, became the interpretive lens for his earlier work.⁸² My hope is that a greater

⁸⁰ I say "in part" because Bonhoeffer did not blindly follow Barth and felt that Barth had emphasised the otherness of God at the expense of the concreteness of God in the world. See *Ibid.*, 188-189.

⁸¹ See Larsen, "The Evangelical Reception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 39-58. In this essay Larsen details the shaky beginning Bonhoeffer had with the evangelical church caused mostly by a misreading of Bonhoeffer's theology.

⁸² Ann L. Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom: Courageously Grasping Reality* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2002), 1-6.

familiarisation with Luther's influence upon Bonhoeffer's theology will help us illuminate his sublime understanding of Christian freedom.

Luther in Context

Martin Luther lived during the momentous time of the Renaissance (contemporary to Michelangelo, Columbus and Copernicus). Life for common people was, however, generally hard and tenuous. Death and disease were a constant threat.⁸³ There were still outbreaks of the Black Plague that had ravaged Europe since the mid-fourteenth century. Luther's family came from the social class of peasant farmers who worked hard just for a standard of subsistence living, generally feeling oppressed with few rights, and heavily taxed under the nobles and autocratic ruling princes of Saxony. Luther's father, Hans, successfully climbed the social ladder, becoming a highly respected town magistrate and copper mine industrialist.⁸⁴ This allowed young Martin a good education which led eventually to him becoming a professor at elector-prince Fredrick the Wise's University in Wittenberg.

Life in Europe was also life within the Holy Roman Empire. Church clergy held a high status and were often supported by the princes or local populace even though they were also under the papal authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The structure of religious life was based around appeasing God through the church practices of confession, penance, pilgrimages, and indulgences.⁸⁵ Arguably the underlying theological current was one of semi-Pelagianism that had been rehashed

⁸³ James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and his Career* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 2003), 34-35.

⁸⁴ Michael A. Mullett, *Martin Luther*, 2nd ed. (Routledge: New York, 2015), 37-39.

⁸⁵ Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 40-43.

within a covenantal soteriology developed by medieval theologians.⁸⁶ Simply put, human beings were saved by fulfilling their side of the covenant, and then, God would fulfil his side.⁸⁷ Practically, an individual's salvation rested upon the faithful observance of religious ritual. Religion did not necessarily produce thoughts of freedom (in this life at least). Accordingly, Kirsten Largen states, "religion was deeply woven into the consciousness of Luther's society, and there was no substantive understanding of freedom that was not coloured by these religious beliefs."⁸⁸

Luther himself wrote of growing up burdened by the inner turmoil of needing to appease an angry God. Even life as a dedicated monk did not ameliorate this burden. Reflecting on his past he says:

I was a good monk and kept my rule so strictly that I could say that if ever a monk could get into heaven through monastic discipline, I was that monk... And yet my conscience would not give me any certainty, but I always doubted and said, 'You didn't do that right. You weren't contrite enough. You left that out of your confession'. ... Far from loving that righteous God who punishes sinners, I actually hated him.⁸⁹

Not only did he experience this inner turmoil, Luther summed up his view of Rome after visiting by saying, "so great and shameless is the godlessness and wickedness there that neither God nor man, neither sin nor disgrace are taken seriously."⁹⁰ The

⁸⁶ Covenantal soteriology was associated with the Thomists; however, there were other ideas of salvation present. The Ockhamists were similar to the Thomists in that both held human works as important for salvation. A third group, following the teaching of Augustine, generally believed that human beings were so depraved that they could add nothing to the saving action of God. Luther was an Augustinian monk. See "The General Introduction" by Tryntje Helfferich in *Martin Luther: On the Freedom of the Christian: With Related Texts*, ed. & trans. by Tryntje Helfferich (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2013), ix-x.

⁸⁷ A. E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 67-69.

⁸⁸ Kristin Johnston Largen, "Freedom *from* and Freedom *for*: Luther's Concept of Freedom for the Twenty-First Century," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 52.3 (Fall 2013): 234.

⁸⁹ Mullett, *Martin Luther*, 62-63.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

soil was fertile for reform, not just in Luther and his native land, but also for the church.

Between the years of 1513 and 1519, whilst teaching as a professor in Wittenberg University, Luther developed the core theological principles of the reformation.⁹¹ It was also during this time that Luther posted the famous Ninety-Five Theses that propelled him into great popularity with the general populace, and also the heated controversy with the Roman Church which eventually led to the accusation of heresy. He also expressed his harsh criticism of the Aristotelian influence so inherently entwined with Aquinas' theology that the church had largely accepted. By 1517 he had reformed the curriculum at Wittenberg from Aristotle, "that buffoon who had misled the church," and from Aquinas who "was the source and foundation of all heresy, error and obliteration of the gospel."⁹² Luther's teaching relied heavily on the church father Augustine, but more importantly he believed that the grounding of theology should be in scripture itself.⁹³

It was Luther's grappling with scripture that brought about his personal experience of freedom. While meditating on Romans 1:17 and wrestling with the righteousness of God that had always condemned him, Luther discovered and awakened to Paul's teaching on justification. He writes: "I began to understand that 'the justice of God' meant that justice by which the just man lives through God's gift, namely by faith... Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."⁹⁴ There is little doubt this was an extremely freeing revelation! The following year Luther published four tracts while awaiting his trial for heresy at the

⁹¹ Ibid., 72. Luther was teaching on the books of Psalms, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews.

⁹² Harry J. Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: History, Movements, People* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University, 2012), 99.

⁹³ Mullett, *Martin Luther*, 76-79.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 83.

Diet of Worms. The most popular at the time was *The freedom of the Christian*, where Luther explains his theology of justification by faith.⁹⁵ *Freedom* was written in the face of death as a heretic,⁹⁶ which would likely have occurred, if not for the continued support and interventions of Fredrick the Wise on Luther's behalf.

Luther sent a copy of *Freedom* to Pope Leo X as a last ditch attempt at reconciliation with the papal court.⁹⁷ Attached was a letter affirming Luther's reverence for Leo, and his wish to prove himself guiltless before his opponents, whom he labeled godless and untrustworthy.⁹⁸ There is no doubt that by this time Luther had absolute contempt for the Roman Church, stating it was more corrupt than Sodom or Babylon, and had become "a completely licentious den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell, so that were the Antichrist to come, he could hardly think of anything that would add to its wickedness."⁹⁹ In his letter, however, Luther portrayed Leo as a lamb amongst the wolves who had the power to make things right, and *Freedom* is Luther's argument that the correct course for church reform was a return to the biblical understanding of justification by faith alone. The tract was incredibly popular, being reprinted nineteen times in German and eight in Latin within seven years of the first publication.¹⁰⁰ Generally the people felt anything but free in many aspects of life and here was something that spoke to the core of their souls and practical life. Luther introduces *Freedom* as "a small thing with respect to size, but... it contains a

⁹⁵ The other writings from this period were *On the Papacy of Rome*, *Address to the Christian Nobility*, and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.

⁹⁶ Timothy Wengert suggests *Freedom* was written as Luther's last word in the months leading up to the Diet of Worms where he faced the charge of heresy, a charge punishable by death. See Timothy J. Wengert, "Luther's Freedom of a Christian for Today's Church," *Lutheran Quarterly* 28 (2014): 1.

⁹⁷ Von Wayne Coppins, "Paul's Juxtaposition of Freedom and Positive Servitude in I Cor 9:19 and its Reception by Martin Luther and Gerhard Ebeling," *Lutherjahrbuch* 78 (2011): 284.

⁹⁸ Luther labeled his opponents as monsters and enemies of Leo and had not a positive word to say of them throughout the letter, see Martin Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther Study Edition*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert et.al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 474-487.

⁹⁹ Luther wrote this in his epistle to Leo X; see *ibid.*, 477.

¹⁰⁰ Wengert, "Luther's Freedom of a Christian for Today's Church," 1.

summary of the whole Christian life, if you understand its meaning.”¹⁰¹ We will discuss *The Freedom of the Christian* in three sections: first, the gift of faith, second, the place of works, and finally, the freedom of the Christian.

The Gift of Faith

Luther begins his argument by proposing the two themes of freedom and servitude. These appear contradictory and yet, as he will show, work together within the Christian. Luther’s letter to Leo can be read as an example of Luther’s own servitude to others, namely Leo, and his freedom to speak against the papal court.¹⁰² These themes are presented within the rhetorical device of the inner and outer man in the attempt to explain that justification is through an “inner” saving faith that produces “outer” works.¹⁰³

We must resist the initial temptation to assume Luther is dividing the human person into spirit and flesh.¹⁰⁴ Luther is not making an ontological statement about human being. Rather, Luther wishes to use this distinction to explain the relationship between faith and works. The two are distinct and yet they are necessarily related. You cannot have faith without works or works without faith. In the same way, a human being is both physical and spiritual, you cannot have one dimension without the other. This will be Luther’s point later in the tract. For now we can rest assured that Luther is not just accepting the philosophical traditions that have influenced Christian thinking. In fact, Luther is very adamant that the influence of Aristotle on Christian theology had been very detrimental. Luther points out that the seemingly

¹⁰¹ Again, from the epistle to Leo X; see Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 487.

¹⁰² Wengert, “Luther’s Freedom of a Christian for Today’s Church,” 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Bernd Wannewetsch argues that this is the “fundamental misunderstanding” of those who interpret Luther incorrectly. See Bernd Wannewetsch, “Luther’s Moral Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 127.

contradictory words physical and spiritual “are said about the same person,”¹⁰⁵ which is exactly his point regarding freedom and servitude - they are said about the same person. At the beginning of the tract we see that Luther is working towards a unity of freedom and servitude within the human person, a unity of faith and works, though faith always has priority in terms of that unity.

The Word of God

As already mentioned, salvation was considered, in Luther’s day, a covenantal relationship between God’s mercy and human works to the extent that works, or the lack of, was the defining factor for salvation. God was still the one who saved, however, this salvation was dependent upon human efforts through the sacraments and practices set by the church. How this played out in practice is that human works came first, the saving action of God second. Luther’s personal breakthrough was in terms of his experience with the word of God. Markus Wriedt explains, “Luther’s Reformation Discovery was first of all a hermeneutic insight, which he had gained from the (re)discovery of Paul’s message on justification.”¹⁰⁶ Luther experienced for the first time a freedom before God as a sinner made righteous through the work of Christ. This righteousness had absolutely nothing to do with any external human work and everything to do with the work of Christ on his behalf. And this righteousness of Christ came to Luther solely by faith, which is a gift of the Spirit.

Luther came to understand that the only thing that can save is God himself and this he does through His word. It is the word of God that saves, not the work of human beings. To explain this Luther reasons that nothing external to the human person can help the inner person. Therefore, no works, no matter how “good” they may seem from a human perspective, bring any benefit to the inner person. Only one thing can

¹⁰⁵ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 489.

¹⁰⁶ Markus Wriedt, “Luther’s Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 91.

bring benefit to the inner or spiritual person, and that is the word of God.¹⁰⁷ For Luther, the word of God was heard in the scriptures.¹⁰⁸ In the reading and preaching of scripture God is speaking, present, and bringing revelation to the human being.¹⁰⁹ The word for Luther was the gospel message of Christ's saving power revealed in the scriptures. He quotes Matthew 4:4: "One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." It is only the word of God that can save. Bread may help the outer man, but the inner man needs the word to penetrate the soul to bring about freedom.

For Luther, faith and the word of God are essentially linked in the saving and freeing action of Christ. In other words, the only access to the word is through faith, and faith is a result of the word acting upon the individual. As soon as we try to insert works into this union of faith and word, the union is destroyed. Scholastic theology had taught the Aristotelian inspired union of faith and love as the justifying means. But the relationship was one where it was love that shaped faith within the human being. This easily became the external works of love helping to produce a saving faith.¹¹⁰ Luther's insistence on "faith alone" places the entire saving work on the word of God. As Luther states, "Therefore, we may consider it certain and firmly established, that the soul can lack everything except the word of God."¹¹¹ The human person is utterly dependent upon the word of God for life and freedom.

The faith Luther is proclaiming is an experience of the word of God and not simply something rational and intellectual, "an Aristotelian virtue cooked up in the soul"

¹⁰⁷ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 490.

¹⁰⁸ Fred W. Meuser, "Luther as Preacher of the Word of God," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 141.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹⁰ Wannewetsch, "Luther's Moral Theology," 128-129.

¹¹¹ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 491.

which it had, according to Luther, become in Scholastic theology.¹¹² When Luther talks of experience he is not thinking of an experience separate from scripture. The experience of faith is found in the engagement with scripture through which God speaks. Faith and word both are God's and he gives them to the human being. In the introduction to his commentary on Romans, Luther says, "faith is God's work in us."¹¹³ Faith comes as a gift through the word of God and is experienced in the human being. In other words, we don't come to faith in Christ, faith comes to us through the word. The word is the active agent that gifts faith to the human being. Faith for Luther is not a virtue or work; faith is the result of the word of God forming the human soul.¹¹⁴ This means that the law and works are totally unnecessary for faith - faith comes solely from the word of God, and it is this faith that justifies the believer.¹¹⁵

What then is the place of the law in God's word? The law, for Luther, was that which shows the human person their complete depravity before the righteous God. The law is not a means to appease God, the law can only bring condemnation and the realisation that there is no human work capable of earning even a glimpse of righteousness. The only option is to fall at the feet of the One who is righteous and shares his righteousness with those who believe in him. Therefore, as Luther argues, "A person is justified and saved not by works or laws but by the Word of God... and by faith."¹¹⁶ The role of the human being is not only the realisation of their inability to earn righteousness but also to understand their complete unrighteousness. In this

¹¹² Wengert, "Luther's Freedom of a Christian for Today's Church," 11.

¹¹³ Robert E. Smith, "Martin Luther's Definition of Faith: An Excerpt from 'An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans,'" accessed 26 May 2018, "<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-faith.txt>.

¹¹⁴ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 496.

¹¹⁵ Wengert, "Luther's Freedom of the Christian for Today's Church," 11

¹¹⁶ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 517.

place one is able to “begin to believe” in the promises of God as opposed to the law of God.

Relational Trust

The faith that Luther writes of in *Freedom* is a relational trust in Christ.¹¹⁷ Luther moves away from the idea that faith is just an intellectual assent to correct doctrine. Rather, it involves trusting in the promises proclaimed by the word of God. Luther had seen scripture divided into two covenants - the covenant of law and the covenant of promise. Saving faith is trusting in the promise of God that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and revealed in scripture. It was upon scripture that Luther took his courageous stand against the charge of heresy before the Diet of Worms, and from scripture that he demanded his opponents provide an argument against his writings. For Luther the gospel is a promise in which the Christian must trust with the heart (Rom 10:10) as well as the mind. God’s word, for Luther, was an active saving agent upon the heart of the individual.

In *Freedom* Luther speaks of three powers of faith. Firstly, he places faith in a relationship that is totally overwhelmed by the word of God. For example, there is nothing human beings can add to the holiness, righteousness, and the goodness of God. The human relationship with God is a result of God coming to us. The human person has nothing to add to the character of God but is “swallowed up” by the majesty of God. The word of God that comes to us does not need good works, not at all. In fact, when the word of God comes to a human being the human being is formed by it.¹¹⁸ Faith is formed within the human heart and the human heart is formed by the word of God.

¹¹⁷ See Wengert’s comment in *Ibid.*, 492, fn. 67.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 496.

The second power of faith, Wengert suggests, should be translated “to trust.”¹¹⁹ As Luther states in the introduction to his commentary on Romans, “Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favour that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.”¹²⁰ This faith firmly believes in the promises of God and the trustworthiness of God to fulfil his promises. For Luther, “This is the highest worship of God.”¹²¹ This trust comes from the recognition of one's own failure and misery before the righteous God, and places oneself at the service of His will. It is from this faith that obedience follows, as we will discuss in more depth soon. But Luther's point here is that obedience follows faith and, therefore, works that are done in an attempt to attain or grasp something of God's righteousness are futile and actually are an act of rebellion. A persons own effort to attain salvation through works is an act of unbelief for God alone is righteous and I am a sinner. Such unbelief robs God of his glory and honour. Luther calls this being “caught in the sin of unbelief.”¹²²

Thirdly, Luther speaks of faith in the analogy of the “joyous exchange.” Here he utilises the biblical imagery of marriage as a picture of what happens in the faith relationship with Christ. The human person and Christ become “one,” united by faith. The Christian is not only saved from God's wrath by faith, but is united with Christ himself. This means that the Christian shares fully in the righteousness of Christ. We understand what this meant for Luther when we hear his words:

Who can even begin to appreciate this royal marriage? What can comprehend the riches of this glorious grace? Here, this rich, upstanding bridegroom, Christ, marries this poor, disloyal prostitute, redeems her from all her evil and adorns her with all his goodness. For now it is impossible for her sins to destroy her, because they have been laid upon Christ and devoured by him.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 497, fn. k.

¹²⁰ Smith, “Martin Luther's Definition of Faith.”

¹²¹ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 498.

¹²² Ibid., 499.

In Christ, her bridegroom, she has her righteousness, which she can enjoy as her very own property.¹²³

We clearly see here the joyous freedom Luther had experienced through the revelation of justification through faith alone. This faith is one of the heart. It is a gift from God and bestows upon the believer the righteousness of God. This is the gospel for which Christ came, bringing the word of God that justifies the sinner through a relational faith. Luther states that “the office of Christ was solely the word.”¹²⁴ This means that Christ came for the purpose of bringing the word of God that alone justifies human beings. For Luther “he is not simply ‘Christ’ but ‘Christ’ for you and me.”¹²⁵ Put plainly, the Christ event was *for* humanity.

Above all Things

The result of this union with Christ not only makes believing human beings righteous, they also obtain all that Christ has.¹²⁶ Luther writes of two ranks that Christ holds; kingship and priesthood. Christ rules over the world through his spiritual kingdom. He is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16). For God has placed Christ “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named... And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things” (Eph 1:21-22). This kingship of Christ is shared with the Christian, for God also “raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 1:6). Additionally, Christ is also the great high priest. As the writer of Hebrews says, “we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1). This

¹²³ Ibid., 501.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 491.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 508.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 500.

rank Luther actually sees as higher than kingship because the priest is worthy to approach and stand before God.¹²⁷

Now, because of the “joyous exchange” mentioned above, “whatever are the bridegroom's belong to the bride.”¹²⁸ Therefore, those who have faith are completely free lords of all. Yes, the Christian comes under the rulership of secular powers and experiences trials and hardships, however, the reality is these things come under the kingship of Christ and are therefore subject to Christ and the Christian. Christ makes “all things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom 8:28). The Christian is therefore set free from the world in the sense that whatever happens in the world does not change the fact that those in Christ are lords over the world. And the Christian is set free from that which had separated them from God and is free to approach God in full confidence (Heb 4:16). Just as no external work can affect the soul's standing before God, so no external circumstance can affect the priesthood and kingship the Christian shares in Christ. The Christian is, through faith, “a completely free lord of all, subject to none.”¹²⁹

Paradise

It is this understanding of saving faith that Luther proclaimed to a people who struggled under the impossible demands of an angry God and, in Luther's view, a misguided religious system built around appeasing the wrath due to them as sinners. Many of those who lived in Luther's time struggled for material and spiritual security.¹³⁰ What joyous freedom is experienced when a Christian realises that not only are their sins removed and forgiven but they are also joined with Christ and share in his priesthood and kingship. In a world of hardships and fear for many,

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 506.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 504.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

¹³⁰ Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 40.

they are now given hope and a promise that soars above the circumstances of life. They have the promise of God in which they trust and under which all things will be worked out for good and His glory.

When Luther experienced this revelation for the first time he remembers it “felt that I... had entered paradise itself.”¹³¹ This was the experience of Christian freedom given freely through the work of Christ for the Christian. This freedom, however, in Luther’s argument, was concerned with the “inner man.” This was a spiritual freedom that worked itself out in the world to be sure, but this freedom was situated in the soul of the Christian who had been set free by, and in, Christ. Freedom for Luther is experienced through the gift of faith upon the “inner man” who shares all things in relationship with Christ through faith. This freedom, however, although not dependent upon human works, does produce good works. To this we now turn.

The Place of Works

When Luther turns his argument towards works he does so by talking of the “outer man.” Freedom is the property of the “inner man” through the gift of faith; works are the outworking of this freedom through the “outer man.” Luther begins by explaining that the inner freedom must work through the outer. We may well have a free soul, but we still live in the world. The outer man deals with the other side of the paradoxical statements that introduced *Freedom*: “The Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Christian freedom is not given solely for the individual’s sake; freedom results, instead, in serving others.

¹³¹ Mullett, *Martin Luther*, 83.

Works that Follow Faith

For Luther, the works of the Christian follow the receiving of faith. It is because of what Christ has done that the Christian does works. Such glorious freedom that has been bestowed upon the Christian should cause the Christian “to serve God joyfully, with boundless love and with no thought of earning anything.”¹³² Luther realises this is somewhat idealistic because the Christian is still engaged in a battle with their flesh. So part of the work that follows faith is training the body into submission to the freedom received. We are called to put to death our fleshly desires that don't align with God's will. This submission, however, is not done to earn salvation, but so we can serve God and others more fully because of our salvation. “Indeed,” says Luther, “more to the point, each person lives only for others and not for himself or herself. The purpose of putting the body in subjection is so that it can serve others more genuinely and more freely.”¹³³ Luther was not against church practices like fasting, confession, and vigils, as long as they serve freedom by helping the Christian live more fully, day by day, as the new creation they now are in Christ.

There are works that also fulfil the command of God. The example Luther uses is Adam in the garden who is set work to do (cf. Gen 2:15). This work was not to earn justification before God because he had not yet sinned. Adam was still considered righteous even though he was commanded to work. Works then cannot be something God had instituted for obtaining righteousness because “work” was instituted before sin. In fact, true works are actually those things done by the righteous. Luther states, “Good works do not make a person good, but a good person does good works.”¹³⁴ Therefore, any work done outside of the righteousness of God bestowed upon the Christian are worthless works to the extent that Luther

¹³² Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 511.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 520.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 514.

calls them “damnable sins.”¹³⁵ Only the works done because of faith and following from faith can be considered “good works.”

Aristotelian ethics had taught that a person becomes good by doing good. This Luther cannot accept. He provides three more analogies that make his point. First, a bishop’s work as a bishop only becomes worthwhile because he is consecrated as a bishop. The bishop does not gain his office by performing the duties of a bishop. No, the duties of the bishop are worthwhile *only* because he is already operating under, and received, the office of bishop. Secondly, a fruit tree must exist before it can produce fruit, and so faith must exist before works. Works for Luther are the fruit of faith. And thirdly, a house does not make a builder, but the builder makes the house. Therefore, a good house must have had a good builder, and vice versa. All these illustrate Luther’s point: “Whatever kind of person one is - either in faith or unbelief - that determines one’s work: good if done in faith, evil if done in unbelief.”¹³⁶ Works then have absolutely nothing to do with a person’s status as good or evil, as righteous or sinner. Works are powerless to bring about good in and of themselves. Therefore, even works that appear to our human perception as evil may in fact be good if they are done in faith. And works that appear good in our sight may actually be evil if done in unbelief. A good work must come from the freedom of the one who is set free by faith. A soon as the Christian who is free does works in any attempt of justification, their freedom is destroyed.¹³⁷ “Morally speaking,” claims Huebner, “we are completely impotent.”¹³⁸ For Luther, the Christian ethic is not concerned primarily with good and evil, but with the working of faith within and upon the individual heart in a way that produces good works.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 515.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 517.

¹³⁸ Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 103.

Faith and Love

The question then arises, what is the purpose of works? Luther's opponents claimed that his theology of justification by faith alone provided licence for Christians to sin. If there is no incentive for works, why would a Christian do them? First of all, for Luther, Christian works do not essentially flow from an impersonal model of cause and effect, they are the result of a relationship of trust with God through his word.¹³⁹ And Luther claims that "the word is of such nature that the soul is formed by it."¹⁴⁰ This means that faith is an ongoing and active agent within the human being that is making something new. Works come from faith because "faith alone offers... obedience."¹⁴¹ Faith is not another "work" that the human being does, it is God's word at work within the human being, redeeming and restoring his creation more and more into its original design. The Christian does good works because they are the natural fruit of active faith upon the heart.

Now then, what is faith doing within the Christian in regard to works? Why is faith producing works? Well, works have a purpose. Luther claims, "any work not directed toward the purpose of either disciplining the body or serving the neighbour... is neither good nor Christian."¹⁴² We have already spoken of works directed towards disciplining the body. These works are unraveling the curse of sin and forming the Christian into the form of Christ. Yes, works help submit the flesh to the Spirit, and can please God. And for Luther, the sin that is overcome is all self-directed love.¹⁴³ It would be somewhat idealistic to assume faith always produces the desire to discipline the body. For example, the discipline of fasting works against the natural desires that the Christian is intentionally suppressing for the purpose of

¹³⁹ Wannemensch, "Luther's Moral Theology," 128-129.

¹⁴⁰ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 496.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 498.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 528-529.

¹⁴³ Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 104.

strengthening the spirit as opposed to the flesh. The goal of the works of discipline is to strengthen faith as it transforms human self-directed love into a love for others. We must remember that these works do not work towards justification but operate and flow from the freedom found within the relationship of the Christian and Christ in faith.

Up to now we have been speaking of the Christian individual. However, human beings do not live isolated before God, they also live within the community of the human race and, for Christians, the community of the church. Each person in this community lives a life directed towards others as opposed to themselves.¹⁴⁴ Just as Christ came in human likeness and served, so the Christian does the same. Free works are “love” that focuses on serving and benefiting others. For Luther, this is the relationship between faith and love. Love for the neighbour is the result of true faith. Faith results in loving others, in giving one’s life for the benefit of the other. This is a free act, otherwise it would not be love. Love cannot be coerced or self-serving, true love can only flow from a true faith. As Kristen Johnston Largen states, “For Luther, Christian freedom begins in the ‘inner person,’ and is first found in faith, which is then translated into love, in the ‘outer person’ and her life of service to others.”¹⁴⁵

As we mentioned above, one of Luther’s revelations was that God works “for me-for us.”¹⁴⁶ True works of love are those works that follow the pattern of God’s work in Christ *for us* and are directed towards the neighbour. What God has done in us should flow on towards the other. As we are increasingly formed by the word of God through faith into the form of Christ we are freed to love our neighbour. Luther explains, “Christian individuals do not live in themselves but in Christ and their

¹⁴⁴ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 520.

¹⁴⁵ Largen, “Freedom from and Freedom for,” 236.

¹⁴⁶ Wriedt, “Luther’s Theology,” 90.

neighbour... They live in Christ through faith and in the neighbour through love.”¹⁴⁷ And just as Christ stood in our place and passed on to us what was his, so we do the same for the other. The Christian stands in the place of the neighbour, being a “christ” towards them. Montover is correct, I think, in seeing that “what Bonhoeffer called vicarious representative action Luther had articulated and developed 400 years earlier.”¹⁴⁸

The freedom bestowed upon the “inner man” does not pull the Christian into a sacred spiritual sphere safe from the world and sin. The opposite is in fact the case. For Luther, the word of God that gives faith to the Christian leads the Christian deeply into the world.¹⁴⁹ True faith is translated into loving action for and on behalf of others in the world in which the Christian daily lives. This means that in whatever estate or kingdom the Christian serves (to use Luther’s terms for the way God has structured the world), they serve for the benefit of the other out of the freedom they have received through faith in Christ. Therefore, the Christian is called to be “a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”¹⁵⁰ This is only possible because of the work of faith within that makes the Christian also “a completely free lord of all, subject to none.”

The Freedom of the Christian

The freedom of the Christian for Luther can be summed up like this: to receive the gift of faith through the word of God that gives freedom and forms the Christian in Christ for the daily life of loving the neighbour. Our freedom as Christians is based

¹⁴⁷ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 530.

¹⁴⁸ Montover, “From Luther to Bonhoeffer,” 355.

¹⁴⁹ Oswald Bayer, “Luther as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 80.

¹⁵⁰ Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 488.

upon the freedom of the Son coming to serve and save humanity. The Son humbled himself for our sake, setting aside his riches and glory, taking on the form of a servant (cf. Phil 2:1-8). This then is the pattern followed by those who are “in Christ.” For Christ did not need works to be righteous and holy, but because he was righteous and holy he served. Christians then, although free from all works and exalted as kings and priests, humble themselves as Christ did and serve the neighbour. Luther states, “I will give myself as a kind of Christ to my neighbour, just as Christ offered himself to me.”¹⁵¹

Luther proclaims in *Freedom* what could be called an incarnational freedom. He looks at Jesus Christ who was simultaneously “in the form of God” and “in the form of a slave”¹⁵² as a prototype for the Christian. These two natures in Christ do not indicate a separation at all. The Christian understanding of Christ is that he is one person and yet fully God and fully man at the same time. To say Christ is fully God is not to deny he is fully man or vice versa. In the same way, Luther speaks of the Christian as both free and a slave, free as the inner man and a slave as the outer man. The Christian is a “completely free lord of all, subject to none,” and also a “completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Freedom and servitude are necessarily joined in the Christian. Faith and works, or faith and love, are two sides of the same coin. Luther’s argument does not separate the human being into different individuals that war against each other, namely the inner and outer person. Rather, he wants to make clear that freedom does not come from any “outer” deed but only in what God does to the human heart.¹⁵³ And this freedom of faith works itself out within and through the human being towards others. Accordingly, the Christian is fully free and fully a servant in Christ, and lives as a “kind of Christ” to others.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 524.

¹⁵² Ibid., 489.

¹⁵³ Lergen, “Freedom from and Freedom for,” 238.

To summarise: in this chapter we have looked at how the Christian is first of all made free by God through no effort or works of their own, but through the work of Christ on their behalf. Then, as a natural consequence of that freedom, we saw how Christians live as servants of God and the neighbour in free works of love just as Christ gave himself to serve. The freedom of the Christian is that which results from the gift of faith, a freedom from sin, burden, self-righteous works, and bondage to the circumstances of life. Christ has freed the Christian from those things and the Christian reigns with Christ in His heavenly kingdom. From this freedom flows the works of Christ through the Christian expressed as love for others.

In the next chapter we will delve more deeply into Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom. We will see clearly where he has drawn from Luther's (re)discovery of justification by faith, especially developing the notion of freedom *for* others after the form of Christ. Bonhoeffer does not just regurgitate Luther's teaching. We will note how Bonhoeffer stands upon it and moves beyond it in helpful ways.

Chapter 3. Bonhoeffer and the Venture of Freedom

Freedom is a theme that weaves its way through Bonhoeffer's entire corpus.¹⁵⁴ This should be no surprise as Bonhoeffer's main influence was Luther, whose message of freedom was at the heart of the reformation gospel. There are many themes addressed in Luther's *Freedom* that Bonhoeffer builds upon, including vicarious representative action, Christ's "for me-for us" structure, and the formation of the human being by the word of God. For Luther, Jesus Christ vicariously sets the Christian free from sin which enables the Christian to live for others in love. Put simply, the gift of freedom produces Christian action. That is, the Christian, through faith, now lives in Christ and therefore shares in the vicarious representative action of Christ for others. Bonhoeffer, however, shifts Luther's location of freedom and places it within a nuanced relationship alongside responsibility and accountability.¹⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer explains, "Responsibility and freedom are mutually corresponding concepts. Responsibility presupposes freedom substantively... just as freedom can exist only in the exercise of responsibility. Responsibility is human freedom that exists only by being bound to God and neighbour."¹⁵⁶ The shift is significant. Freedom is not something penultimate to action but is essentially connected to Christian action.

Our focus in this chapter will be Bonhoeffer's unfinished *Ethics* manuscript "History and Good [2]." Initially, however, we will utilise *Creation and Fall* where Bonhoeffer delineates his perspective on freedom in relation to the freedom of God that has been Christologically revealed. We will first explore how Bonhoeffer develops his motif of freedom that is situated in the relational bonds involving God and the neighbour. It

¹⁵⁴ Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, 10-11.

¹⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 257.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

is this “bond” that provides the counterpart to freedom for responsible life.¹⁵⁷ And secondly, we will delve into the relationship of responsibility and human freedom. We will see how these are shaped by the Christological revelation of freedom being *for* and how this freedom is concretely formed in the life of the church-community within and *for* the world.

The Relational Bonds of Responsibility

Human beings, in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, are called to live responsibly. As Bonhoeffer makes clear in his Christology lectures, the response of the human being before the revelation of ultimate reality in the person of Christ is to either die themselves or rise up and kill Christ.¹⁵⁸ This choice, however, does not issue from freedom, but rather from grace. As with Luther, the ability to respond to Christ in faith is itself a gift. Freedom is not the ability to choose to be responsible; just as, for Bonhoeffer, responsibility does not issue from freedom. Responsibility is the correct response in faith to the all-encompassing claim of Christ upon human life.¹⁵⁹ This responsible life is concretely found in “life’s bond to human beings and to God, and by the freedom of one’s own life. It is this bond of life to human beings and to God that constitutes the freedom of our own life.”¹⁶⁰ We will first explore what Bonhoeffer means by this “bond of life” that binds responsibility and freedom.

Life’s Bond to God

God’s relationship with his creation is rooted in His freedom to be *for* creation. This is defined in Bonhoeffer’s Christological exposition of the first chapters of Genesis, first delivered as a lecture series, and later published as *Creation and Fall*. The “spark”

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 257.

¹⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York*, DBWE 10, 302-307.

¹⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 254.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 257.

of creation, so to speak, is the freedom of God to create. Creation is an “entirely gratuitous and unconditioned expression of divine freedom.”¹⁶¹ “In the beginning,” Bonhoeffer argues, “that is, out of freedom, out of nothing - God created heaven and earth.”¹⁶² The Creator’s connection to creation is only through freedom.¹⁶³ This connection is that God creates through his free word.¹⁶⁴ The word of God is his free commandment that creates. Bonhoeffer makes sure we don't understand this as a “word” that produces a “work.” Rather, the word, which is the command of God, is at the same time the work. “God’s word *is* already the work.”¹⁶⁵ Bonhoeffer is not dissolving God into his creation but is explaining the deep connection of God to his creation. He explains, “Creation is not an ‘effect’ of the Creator from which one could read off a necessary connection with the cause (the Creator); instead it is a work created in freedom in the word.”¹⁶⁶ What Bonhoeffer wants to do here is keep God wholly free from his creation while at the same time connecting God to creation in His free command. God is, at the same time, both transcendent and immanent in relation to His creation.

Bonhoeffer felt that Barth’s theology of revelation in the word eventually made God unknowable.¹⁶⁷ God remained utterly free from his creation and is revealed solely in the historical word. This means, in Bonhoeffer’s appraisal, that human knowledge of God can become the possession of the human being.¹⁶⁸ Alternatively, if God remains utterly transcendent then he cannot be known at all except in reflection upon his acts.¹⁶⁹ For Bonhoeffer, this makes God radically free from human beings and only

¹⁶¹ Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, 52.

¹⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3, 36.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶⁷ Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, 28.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

knowable in the realm of ideas. Bonhoeffer's answer is to hold God's transcendence and immanence together as revealed in the incarnated, resurrected and present person of Christ. This does not mean God is reduced to that understood by the knower; but rather, that God has revealed himself to the knower in Christ historically and also in the concrete present. Revelation is therefore not solely historical, but also contemporaneous.¹⁷⁰ Christine Tietz explains, that in Bonhoeffer's epistemology, "there has to be a continuity of revelation in history."¹⁷¹

For Bonhoeffer, God's majesty is that he has freely given himself to his creation in His command; that being the present person of Christ concretely experienced in the church-community. Bonhoeffer states,

In revelation... it is a question of the freedom of God, which finds its strongest evidence precisely in that God freely chose to be bound to historical human beings and to be placed at the disposal of human beings. God is free not from human beings but for them. Christ is the word of God's freedom. God *is* present... [and] graspable in the word within the church.¹⁷²

This does not mean that God is making himself dependent upon creation. In fact, "God remains wholly free over against what is created. God is not bound to what is created; instead God binds it to God."¹⁷³ God remains totally free from creation and yet binds creation to himself through His free command. This movement, the *self-binding* of creation to God, is key to Bonhoeffer's theological work, and therefore, his delineation of freedom. In other words, even though God is "utterly beyond the world"¹⁷⁴ he is also radically and intimately *for* the world in His command.

¹⁷⁰ Christopher Holmes, "Resurrection and Reality in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Australasian Journal of Bonhoeffer Studies* 2.1 (2014), 4.

¹⁷¹ Christine Tietz, "Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church," in *Ontology and Ethics: Bonhoeffer and Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Adam C. Clark & Michael Mawson (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 36.

¹⁷² Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, DBWE 2, 90-91.

¹⁷³ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3, 41.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

For Bonhoeffer, the command of God is ultimately the present person of Jesus Christ who calls and forms the church community by the Spirit.¹⁷⁵ In Christ we see the fulfilment of the connection between God and creation. At its most clear, the God-man Jesus Christ witnesses to God's freedom *for* creation. The vicarious representative action of Christ for humanity is lived in the creative freedom of obedience before the Father (cf. John 5:19). The separation between God and His creation is united in the person of Christ who binds humanity to Himself in obedience to the Father. The incarnation is the free act of God *par excellence*. There is nothing that required the Son to take on human flesh except the freedom of God expressed in being *for* His creation. God is removed from His creation by being the Creator, but is also bound to creation in Jesus Christ. God is, therefore, concrete, near, present, and knowable in Christ. For in Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). Jesus proclaimed, "If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:7).¹⁷⁶ God, in freedom, has given himself to creation in the incarnated God-man Jesus Christ, whose very essence is *pro-me* because the majesty of God is *for* creation.

In Jesus Christ we see this relationship clearly, for as the God-man he is God-for-humanity and humanity-for-God at the same time. Out of God's freedom the Son takes on humanity and stands in humanity's place vicariously; and out of Christ's freedom he lives in obedience before the Father. Human freedom is not something individualistic and possessed; it is gracious gift expressed foundationally in living *for* the Other, namely God, in the form of Christ.¹⁷⁷ Genuine freedom is never earned,

¹⁷⁵ Tietz, "Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church," 37.

¹⁷⁶ James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology: Classical and Revolutionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 138-139. Bonhoeffer is building upon Luther's affirmation of *finitum capax infiniti*: the finite has the capacity for the infinite. Woelfel suggests that *finitum capax infiniti* is arguably the central aspect of Bonhoeffer's entire theological corpus.

¹⁷⁷ Joel D. Lawrence, "Death Together: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Becoming the Church for Others," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 116.

as if a possibility or potential; it is given, a *justicia pasiva*.¹⁷⁸ This means it is never the possession of the human being, but always belongs to God. Bonhoeffer positions human freedom within a relational context, in that it exists first and foremost in relation to God. Bonhoeffer is clear, "Freedom is not a quality a human being has; it is not an ability, a capacity, an attribute of being... Anyone who scrutinizes human beings in order to find freedom finds nothing of it... instead it is a relation and nothing else."¹⁷⁹ Human freedom is essentially relational and this relation involves taking responsibility before God and for the sake of God.¹⁸⁰ For Bonhoeffer, living "before God" entails living responsibly in the created freedom of being one of God's creations. It includes the understanding that we are God's creatures and therefore answerable to him with our complete lives. The primary bond of life for human beings is their being bound relationally with God who has freely bound creation to himself.

Life's Bond to Others

Humanity is free only in relation to God's gracious giving of Himself to humanity. Yet this relational context also flows toward the world and the other. Bonhoeffer summarises, "Human freedom for God and the other person and human freedom from the creature in dominion over it constitute the first human beings' likeness to God."¹⁸¹ The image of God in humanity is that we are created to live in the freedom given by God. However, his freedom is never autonomous, it never exists in isolation; rather, it is always *for* something other. It is for God, the neighbour, and the world. Reminiscent of Luther's paradox of being master of all and subject to all, Bonhoeffer claims that "There is no 'being-free-from' without a 'being-free-for.'"¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3, 65. *Justicia pasiva* was of course was Luther's fundamental re-discovery

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

¹⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 256.

¹⁸¹ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3, 67.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

Where Luther's account of freedom was individually explained, Bonhoeffer drives freedom into the church-community. Because Jesus Christ is present as the church-community, Christ's freedom is relational and experienced in relation to the other and *only* in relation to the other. In Bonhoeffer's second dissertation *Act and Being* he comments, "God's freedom has woven itself into this person-like community of faith."¹⁸³ Just as Christ's entire life is lived *pro-me*, those who live in Christ live for others as Christ present in and as the church-community. Life is essentially a relationship before God and for others. Or as Tietz summarises, "personhood requires community."¹⁸⁴ Human life is relational to the extent that, for Bonhoeffer, to be human requires these relational bonds.

Bonhoeffer takes Luther's call for Christians to be a "kind of Christ" to another level. For Bonhoeffer, we are Christ to the other just as Christ is present to us in the other.¹⁸⁵ The church-community is the present body of Christ where Christ is experienced concretely in the relationships of those called. As a Christian, the human person is "in" Christ and by faith is being formed through the Spirit into the form of Christ which is *for* the other. Just as Christ's entire existence is vicarious responsible action, so those found *in* Christ have the form of life as vicarious responsible action for others. As Bonhoeffer explains, "vicarious representative action and therefore responsibility is possible only in completely devoting one's own life to another person."¹⁸⁶ We see here that this constitutes responsible life. We are bound to others because Christ bound himself to humanity. This is not "simply a community of human beings,"¹⁸⁷ but "Christ existing as church-community."¹⁸⁸ To be truly human

¹⁸³ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, DBWE 2, 112.

¹⁸⁴ Tietz, "Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church," 39.

¹⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 256.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹⁸⁷ Tietz, "Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church," 39.

¹⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, DBWE 1, 121.

is only possible in Christ. Bonhoeffer's vicarious representative action *is* responsible action. And no one can escape the call of responsibility because it constitutes human life in its essence.¹⁸⁹ An example Bonhoeffer uses is that of a father who is called to responsibility for his children, and regardless of whether he is a good or bad father, he remains a father.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, all human beings are called to responsible life because responsible life, which is vicarious representative action, is real human life. "To be human," Lawrence concludes, "is to be for others."¹⁹¹

To summarise, just as Christ simultaneously is God-for-humanity and humanity-for-God, Christians also "simultaneously represent Christ before human beings, and represent human beings before Christ."¹⁹² To be human means to be in relation *for* the other and *before* God. It is within these relational bonds that freedom is expressed. And, as we have seen, this freedom has the essence of being *for*. It is in this sense that human beings are able to truly live. Hans Pfeifer captures the significance of Bonhoeffer's relational location of freedom by summarising, "all human reality exists in relationships, to God and to the fellow human."¹⁹³ This is the concrete location where human freedom finds its expression. Now, when freedom is reversed and used to serve ourselves we transgress the created boundaries of human existence. Before we continue to discuss responsibility and freedom it will be helpful to understand how human life and freedom are structured in regard to life and limit.

¹⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 258-259.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹⁹¹ Lawrence, "Death Together," 117.

¹⁹² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 256.

¹⁹³ Hans Pfeifer, "Ethics for the Renewal of Life: A Reconstruction of Its Concept," in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 144.

Life and Limit

God has placed human freedom within limits. For Bonhoeffer, limit is not opposed to freedom; in fact, the opposite is true. Using the imagery of Genesis, Bonhoeffer explains the relationship of freedom and limit. At the center of the Garden of Eden, meaning at the center of human existence, God sets two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As Joel Lawrence summarises, “These two trees stand at the center of the garden precisely because both indicate what it is to be human. Both life and limit are at the center of human existence.”¹⁹⁴ Life and limit are linked in what it means to be human, and therefore, free. Freedom is not the dissolution of limits. Rather, “the limit is grace because it is the basis of creatureliness and freedom; the boundary is the center.”¹⁹⁵

The sin of humankind is the rejection of our limits before God and the other. It is the failure to accept our human-ness. The rebellion of Adam and Eve sprung from the pious questioning of God’s command (which Bonhoeffer equates in *Discipleship* to the actual rejection of God’s command).¹⁹⁶ The result is what Luther called the *cor curvum in se*, the heart turned in on itself. Sin orientates human beings to themselves where they become enslaved to an autonomous existence as opposed to their created relational essence. Here we easily see Bonhoeffer’s radical departure from modern concepts of freedom. In transgressing the limit human beings actually desperately hinder their ability to live in true freedom.¹⁹⁷ The created freedom that human beings were given *for* each other and the world in obedience to God’s command was lost and replaced with the knowledge of good and evil. Where the limit, that being the

¹⁹⁴ Lawrence, “Death Together,” 117.

¹⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3, 87.

¹⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 71.

¹⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer explains that human beings under sin still retained a “relative freedom,” however in Christ the absolute freedom of being *for* is made possible. See Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 174.

command of God, was once center, now the human being becomes the center of their own world.

Freedom is not found in the knowledge of good and evil; rather, it is obedience to God's command in acknowledgement that we live before God as his creatures. The freedom of Jesus Christ was not the endless options of choice, or the isolation from external impulsion to act a certain way.¹⁹⁸ Christ's freedom is that he lived in responsible obedience before God in vicarious responsible action for others. Christ was obedient because he was free; and he was free because he was obedient. Freedom and obedience are not opposed to each other but together lead to life in its fullness. The limit, therefore, is essential to human freedom. To transgress the limit is to destroy freedom. Bonhoeffer's Christian ethic is totally opposed to any preconditioned idea of good and evil; instead, it is one of obedience to the command of God in each given situation. It is obedience to life itself that demands the center of our existence.

Life, as with limit, is also at the center of human existence. And this "life is not a thing, an essence, or a concept, but a person - more specifically, a particular and unique person."¹⁹⁹ At the center of human existence is Jesus Christ who is Life (John 14:6). This means that we cannot and should not try to explain what life is, but only grasp the revelation of "who" life is.²⁰⁰ Therefore, life, like freedom, is not a possession of humanity, it is "outside" of ourselves and "in" another person. Life is inherently relational. To be sure, real life only exists "in" Jesus Christ, not metaphorically, but in reality.²⁰¹ This life is given only when, in response to the revelation of Christ, the human being dies to their own life and shares in Christ's

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 249-250.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

resurrection. Humanity lives within the contradiction of Christ's "No" over our fallen humanity, and His "Yes to new life."²⁰² In other words, true life in Christ includes both resurrection life and the constant dying to the old life. Life includes victory, joy, success and happiness, just as much as dying includes humility, suffering, and surrender.²⁰³ These things are united because they are united in Christ, and Christ is our life. Life in Christ is not abstract or idealistic; rather, it is concrete within the brokenness of God's world and yet lives in light of the reconciliation already achieved in Christ. To live before God, then, is to live in Christ, to have Christ as the center of our lives in the midst of the world which he has reconciled to himself.

In relational terms then, Bonhoeffer can say, "Only in relation to Jesus Christ is the basis for our relation to other human beings and to God. Just as Jesus Christ is our life, so we may say... that other human beings and that God are our life."²⁰⁴ To live means to live *for* God and others in the form of Christ who lived *for* God and others. We only relate to God and others in Christ and therefore in the form of Christ. Our relation is one of self-denial and surrender, and therefore, victory and joy. We encounter others and the Other in the Yes and No proclaimed over our lives by Christ. It is a life "lived in answer to the life of Jesus Christ (as the Yes and No to our life), we call *responsibility*."²⁰⁵ Responsible life before God and the other is the giving of one's whole life over to be *for* God and *for* the other. It is the denial of self in response to the person of Christ and the living for others in the form of Christ. This is true life.

²⁰² Ibid., 252.

²⁰³ Ibid., 251-252.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 254.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Italics original.

In summary, we have discussed the relational bonds within which humanity has been created in God's freedom. The human person is bound to God and the other in Christ who is at the center of our life. We have been able to trace the prominent place the concept of freedom has in these bonds as counterpart to the structure of responsible life. It is these relational bonds and humanity's created freedom that form the concrete location of responsible life. Bonhoeffer claims "it is this bond of life to human beings and to God that constitutes the freedom of our life. Without this bond and without this freedom there can be no responsibility."²⁰⁶ Now we wish to delve more deeply into the essential and concrete relationship between freedom and responsibility as revealed in the vicarious representative action of Jesus Christ *for* the world and *before* God.

Responsibility: Good, Guilt, and Love

Responsible Action

Responsible action is action in accord with ultimate reality which is God's becoming human in Christ. Responsible action is not, as we discussed in chapter one, action in line with some notion of good. Responsibility is not a retreat into a so called ethical goodness, even if wrapped in religious language. The perceived good becomes a law under which genuine freedom is lost.²⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer uses the New Testament depiction of the Pharisees as an example of this. For them "every moment of life turns into a situation of conflict in which they have to choose between good and evil."²⁰⁸ They are torn between choices that are justified by their interpretation of God's law. Jesus, however, always rises above the choice between right and wrong, between good and evil, and instead lives in obedience to the Father. Here we see

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 257.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 310.

Christ living in freedom.²⁰⁹ Created freedom is living in obedience, or better yet, in accord to the command of God who is Jesus Christ present in the concrete situation and relationship. The “good” of responsible action is found only in Jesus Christ, not as an example of good, or as one who teaches what is good, but as the One who is *the good*. We are liberated from the burden of trying to “be good” before God and the other because we are invited to partake in the One who *is* good. Responsibility does not mean knowing the specific action but knowing the One in whom we act and allowing Him to form us into His concrete presence by the Spirit. As the church-community is formed by the Spirit into the revealed reality of Jesus Christ, individuals are freed to act in free responsibility for the other and before God. It is worth quoting Bonhoeffer at length here:

Thus a profound mystery of history as such is disclosed to us. Precisely those who act in the freedom of their very own responsibility see their action as both flowing into and springing from God’s guidance. Free action, as it determines history, recognises itself ultimately as being God’s action, the purest activity as passivity... only where freedom understands its origin, essence, and goal to be grounded in God’s own action, which means only where it is God who appears on the scene as an acting subject (through the free, responsible action of a human being), can we speak about good in history.²¹⁰

Responsible action is boldly acting in accord with the person of Christ. It is action that “fits” with the cruciform nature of Christ that has died to selfish desires and seeks the best for the neighbour. It is action that is in fact the action of God in history! As the church lives responsibly, Christ *appears* in our action. This is not a nice metaphor or encouraging statement of faith, but the reality of Jesus Christ being present now as the church-community. And in fact, it is within the concrete situation where a person acts responsibly that they become “a real person.”²¹¹ As we saw above, true person-hood is found only in responsible relations in Christ. In

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 311-313.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 226.

²¹¹ Brian Gregor, “Shame and the Other,” in *Ontology and Ethics*, 83.

responsible action the human person becomes real as Christ becomes concretely present in their action. In this sense, responsible action is action *in* the person of Christ, and therefore, action in accord with reality.

We must note that Bonhoeffer uses the word “passivity” in the quote above, not because we are not called to act, but because this action does nothing for our individual righteousness. Responsible action is passive because it is free from the need to earn God’s approval. It is passive because it is not a justifying action. That is because this passive action is action in accord with Jesus Christ revealed who justifies vicariously and graciously. In other words, human responsible action is Christ’s action formed in us. There is no room for exemplarism here. Christopher Holmes correctly states that “exemplarism in Christian ethics trades upon principles and a dead Jesus, a Jesus who lives only inasmuch as his example guides.”²¹² Responsible action is not action shaped after the example of a historical figure, but action formed by the contemporaneous Christ who is present concretely in responsible Christian action. Action that is free responsible action is truly Christ’s action here and now.

Responsible Guilt

Another aspect of Christ’s vicarious representative action is the taking on of guilt. Christ who was without sin became sin for our sake (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). He did not shy away from sharing the guilt deserved for human beings. Christ takes the responsibility of our sin upon himself and carries our guilt to the cross. It is Christ’s acting in the freedom of being *pro-me* that enables him to take on human guilt. In freedom he chooses to act on the behalf of humanity. In the Garden we see Adam hiding from God because of his disobedience. He is unable to accept that he is guilty.

²¹² Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, 24.

In contrast, Christ in his created freedom takes on the guilt of Adam, and as the new Adam, is the first of God's new creation. Therefore, vicarious representative action for the Christian entails acknowledging personal and corporate guilt, and standing before God as one who is guilty.

Traditionally, many have seen Christian freedom as a freedom from the guilt of sin because Christ took it for us. However, for Bonhoeffer, true freedom is the acceptance of the guilt of our sin and standing before God even though we are guilty. This is not a one-time event for Bonhoeffer. Living out of freedom, and not under the knowledge of good and evil, means that the human being must take action in the world without knowing ultimately whether the action is good or evil. They act in obedience to the command of God, which is in conformity to the person of Jesus Christ, and place their action into the hands of God. To make a judgement on "good" is essentially the human being justifying themselves instead of standing before the One who justifies. The responsible action we are called to live "takes place in the sphere of relativity, completely shrouded in the twilight that the historical situation casts upon good and evil."²¹³ The Christian is free to act responsibly before God in alignment with the ultimate reality revealed in Jesus Christ knowing that their guilt has already been taken in the person of Christ.²¹⁴ Responsible human action is lived in the understanding that in Jesus Christ we are both guilty and forgiven. This does not mean the Christian has license to do anything! This is not a freedom to go out and sin! What it means is that we do not bring a pre-chosen moral code or ethical program to each given situation; rather, we bring each new concrete situation before the ultimate reality of Jesus Christ revealed.²¹⁵ We live responsibly in light of this in vicarious representative action for others. In line with Bonhoeffer, we

²¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 284.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 275-276.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

can say that true freedom does not make human beings free *from* guilt, rather, they are free to stand before God even though they are guilty, and free to act boldly in accord with Jesus Christ because they know they are forgiven.

Not only does Bonhoeffer's *freedom for* place the human being guilty before the justifying God, it also asks them to accept the guilt of their neighbour. We are called to act in alignment with Christ's *pro-me* structure for our neighbour by carrying the guilt of the other, thereby standing together before God. Bonhoeffer states that those who "place their personal innocence above their responsibility for other human beings... are blind to the fact that precisely in so doing they become even more egregiously guilty."²¹⁶ The pursuit of personal innocence is exactly the pious action of the "heart turned in on itself." If the human being tries to justify themselves in any way they actually become guiltier. In a paradoxical manner, the more we try to erase our guilt the guiltier we become. And yet, as we accept our guilt, and the guilt of our neighbour, in the free act of responsibility, we are justified.

Responsible Love

In the previous chapter we saw how Luther shaped the relationship between faith and love. Faith, for Luther, is what produces the works of love for others as opposed to the love for one-self. We are free from sin, i.e. the love of self, and freed to love others just as Christ acted in love towards us. Bonhoeffer concurs, stating in his own terms, "God's love liberates human perception, which has been clouded and led astray by love of self, for the clear recognition of reality, the neighbour, and the world; thus, and only thus, is one readied to perceive and undertake genuine responsibility."²¹⁷ The Christian is liberated from the blindness of anthropocentric

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 242.

justification into the revelation of the ultimate reality of God's reconciling work in the person of Jesus Christ. Action in accord with this ultimate reality is love.

This love must be concrete and is therefore only love when confronted with real human beings in real life situations. We are called to live in God's love which is seen in the incarnate love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is "the one who concretely enacts God's love."²¹⁸ We see what love is *in reality* by witnessing the one who is ultimate reality. And Christ acted, not in some ethical and ideal plane, but *for* and *within* the concrete real world of human beings. Freedom is the gift that allows human beings the space to act responsibly *for* others in light of the concrete other and the concrete circumstances of the real world. Freedom is not an abstract ideal or fanciful experience belonging to the human being. Rather, freedom is the concrete action of loving God by loving others. Freedom is the gift of living in love for God and the world by loving the real neighbour in the concrete circumstances of everyday life. This gift is received only by the recognition of "Jesus Christ as God's love for the real world."²¹⁹ Love is not a feeling or motivating factor, love is action in accord with Jesus Christ towards the concrete neighbour.

We would be mistaken to think Bonhoeffer is proposing a situational ethic.²²⁰ This is not the case. The Christian does not bring an ethical ideal to each new situation and thereby attempt to discern the correct action. Rather, the Christian brings the concrete situation and places it before the present person of Christ.²²¹ This is not to create a "what would Jesus do" moment, but allows Christ's presence to form the action of the Christian. And this action is one that originates in the actual person of

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

²²⁰ See Matthew D. Kirkpatrick, "The Teleological Suspension of the Ethical," in *Ontology and Ethics*, 98-99.

²²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 99.

Christ.²²² There is a beautiful simplicity in Bonhoeffer's thinking here. The human being is not faced with a list of tasks, or an impossible standard to attain, but with the real person, in real situations, towards whom they act in love, which is action in accord with the person of Christ. For Bonhoeffer, this action is mostly self-evident. It is what a responsible person would do who is being formed into the person of Christ within the church-community. It is worth quoting Bonhoeffer at length again:

The freedom of Jesus is not the arbitrary choice of one among countless possibilities. Instead, it consists precisely in the complete simplicity of his action for which there are never several possibilities, conflicts, or alternatives, but always only one. Jesus calls this option the will of God. He calls it his *foed* to do this will. This will of God is his life. He lives and acts not out of knowledge of good and evil, but out of the will of God. There is only *one* will of God. In it, the origin has been regained. It is the source of freedom and simplicity in everything that is done.²²³

Jesus Christ as ultimate reality revealed shows us what true freedom is for the human being. And this freedom is obedience to the will of God just as the will of God is the source of freedom. The Christian is liberated from the burden of having to justify oneself. But this "freedom from" is found in a life lived responsibly before God and for the neighbour. There is a nuanced switch here. Where Luther would say we love the neighbour because we have been set free, Bonhoeffer would say we *are* free as we *are* loving the neighbour. Freedom *is* the responsible action of loving the neighbour in obedience to the command of God. We can only really love out of freedom. The two, freedom and responsibility, are essentially connected and exist only in the relational bond to God and the neighbour.

²²² *Ibid.*, 231.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 313.

The Command of God that Forms Freedom

We know that for Bonhoeffer God's commandment is ultimately Jesus Christ revealed. This means that human action that obeys the command of God is responsible action in accordance with the person of Jesus Christ towards the world and the other. We are free to act responsibly, in light of the cross and the church-community, before God and towards the other, with the assurance that our guilt in any action is taken care of in Christ. For even our good works are really Christ's work in us anyway. God's commandment aims to allow the human being the freedom of living daily life responsibly. Jesus Christ, as the Command of God, and freedom, as the gift given to Christians, are being formed in the church-community by the Spirit daily as those called lay down their lives to live for others. Bonhoeffer talks of the commandment as being permission to live life as opposed to a legalistic prescription for action.

God's commandment is *permission*. It is distinguished from all human laws in that it *commands freedom*. It proves itself as *God's* commandment in that it eliminates this contradiction, in that the impossible becomes possible, and in that it really commands what lies beyond anything that can be commanded, namely, freedom. This is the lofty aim of God's commandment. It is not any less costly. Permission, freedom, does not mean that God now concedes to human beings a field where, after all, they could exercise their own choice, free from God's commandment. Rather, this permission, this freedom, is in fact generated precisely by God's commandment; it is possible only through and within God's commandment. It is never detached from God's commandment. It remains *God's* permission.²²⁴

The commandment of God in Jesus Christ forms freedom to live in accord with his person. The commandment calls the human being to die to themselves and receive life within the One who is *life* (John 14:6). This command operates "in the center and richness of daily life."²²⁵ The command of God, for Bonhoeffer, should produce "the

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 382-383.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 369.

freely affirmed, self-evident life in church, marriage, family, work, and state.”²²⁶ The Christian is motivated by the center, by life, by the commandment, by Jesus Christ himself.²²⁷ Through the vicarious representative action of Christ taking the guilt of the world upon himself and destroying the power of sin over humanity, Jesus Christ has allowed the human person to be free from the burden of living under the knowledge of good and evil in every action. He instead provides life for those in him. There is freedom to be the creature, to fulfil our created purpose to reflect God, not in our own strength, but in Christ. The “lofty” aim of the commandment is to call God’s creatures back to the freedom of life before Him and for the other.

How does Jesus Christ as the command of God form the church-community? As we discussed in chapter one, Christ is present in the church-community in the word, the sacrament and the sociality of the community. Christ’s presence is active in these to form His people. We would be mistaken to think Christ’s contemporaneity sets up a direct mystical connection to the will of God. Christ speaks to his community through the testimony of scripture²²⁸ and the words of the preacher. We must “immerse ourselves again and again, for a long time and quite calmly, in Jesus’ life, his sayings, actions, sufferings, and dying.”²²⁹ Scripture is that which witnesses to Jesus Christ. Members of the community in Christ also become bearers of Christ’s word to each other.²³⁰ Christ is present within the community in a way that is forming his followers into his being. We are called to “participation in the being of Jesus.”²³¹ The goal of the Christian “is to be shaped into the entire *form* of the *incarnate*, the *crucified*, and the *risen one*.”²³² And this happens as the one called daily

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 386.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 370.

²²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 201.

²²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 515.

²³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life together and the Prayer Book of the Bible*, DBWE 5, 32.

²³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 501.

²³² Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 285.

lays down their life and is raised anew in Christ by the Spirit. Bonhoeffer trusts that the Spirit of God will form the Christian who responsibly responds to the command of God addressed to them. As the apostle Paul says, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). For Bonhoeffer, as the Christian embraces the life of the church-community they are progressively transformed into the form of Christ by the Spirit.

It must be noted that the work of formation is the work of the Spirit. Bonhoeffer's strong Christological focus can leave a perceived lack of pneumatology in his theological work.²³³ However, we see continually throughout his corpus the out-working of his belief that "through the Holy Spirit, the crucified and risen Christ exists as the church-community."²³⁴ The ability to live in freedom and love the neighbour is only possible when the Holy Spirit is "poured out... into our hearts."²³⁵ Any encounter with Christ is an encounter mediated and brought by the Holy Spirit.²³⁶ We can be confident that, for Bonhoeffer, the way in which ultimate reality becomes real is through the work of the Spirit, forming the concrete church-community into the present Christ. Even if not explicitly stated, the Spirit is always in the background, pointing the Christian towards Christ and realising the command of God within the church-community. The command of God, therefore, becomes real in the life of the community by the Spirit. The Spirit actualises true freedom (cf. 2 Cor 3:17).

²³³ Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, 59. Nickson provides a brief defence for Bonhoeffer, see 58-60.

²³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 220. Michael Mawson provides insight into Bonhoeffer's often overlooked pneumatology in relation to the church-community as seen in his early work *Sanctorum Communio*; see Micheal Mawson, "The Spirit and the Community: Pneumatology and Ecclesiology in Jenson, Hütter and Bonhoeffer," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15.4 (October 2013): 453-468.

²³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, DBWE 1, 171.

²³⁶ For example, see Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 95 & 290.

There is a humble confidence that flows from the commanded permission of Jesus Christ to live in the responsible freedom of being a beloved creature of God. There is a liberation from the stress and endless turmoil of trying to justify oneself. Life is received as a gift and the Christian is permitted to enjoy life in their created freedom before God. In this place, the “ought” in action becomes clear.

God’s commandment allows human beings to be human before God. It lets the flow of life take its course, lets human beings eat, drink, sleep, work, celebrate, and play without interrupting those activities, without ceaselessly confronting them with the question whether they were actually permitted to sleep, eat, work, and play, or whether they did not have more urgent duties.²³⁷

In Christ we are provided space to live as human beings, in the knowledge that we may yet sin, but comforted because we are forgiven. We are commanded to live life with everything it may bring before us. The command is a call to life and “demands faith from an undivided heart, and love of God and neighbour with all our heart and soul.”²³⁸ This must be undertaken with the full knowledge that Christ was both crucified and resurrected. The gift of life is not an escape from the fallenness and brokenness of the world. It is a bold step into the world knowing that life brings both pain and joy, suffering and success. Freedom is not an escape from the world but the ability to act responsibly in the midst of the world with the knowledge that Christ has attained ultimate victory.

Bonhoeffer does allow in his treatment of the command of God those times at the boundary where the “ought” may not be so clear. These are extraordinary and “borderline cases.”²³⁹ Here responsible action clashes with the law of scripture. For example, scripture witnesses to the real community as a space where murder is unacceptable (Matt 5:21-22). However, an act in vicarious representative action for

²³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 384-385.

²³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4, 203.

²³⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 273.

others may entail killing another human being. This was very real for Bonhoeffer who acted in the plot to assassinate Hitler. What then does the human being do in this situation? What is the “ought” required of the human being? The risk is to fall into antinomianism or literal legalism. Both these are unacceptable for Bonhoeffer. He moves beyond the anthropocentric question of human action and to the revealed person of Jesus Christ. He does this because “Jesus Christ rather than the law is now the ultimate.”²⁴⁰ Human action is free responsibility with the understanding that the action could very well be a guilty action. We remember Luther suggested that from our vantage point evil action might actually be good, or vice versa. Our concern is solely responsible obedience to the revealed person of Jesus Christ. This is risky ground and should not be undertaken without serious consideration, and as being a rare borderline case, does not negate the simplicity of the ought in common daily life.

The formation of the Christian community into Christ also encompasses the whole world. Bonhoeffer speaks of the mandates as the worldly structure commanded by God within which daily life is experienced. These mandates are “work, marriage, government, and church.”²⁴¹ All human beings live within these mandates and therefore Christians are called to live in all four. In fact, “the practice of the Christian life can be learned only under these four mandates of God.”²⁴² The Christian cannot retreat into the “spiritual” area and neglect the rest. Responsible and free action in Christ is to be lived in the midst of the world and not only in the church. The church is for the world. As Bonhoeffer famously said, “the church is the church only when it exists for others.”²⁴³ The church-community as a mandate stands vicariously in the place of the world, and also as the place where the world’s destiny is fulfilled in

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 282.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 68.

²⁴² Ibid., 69.

²⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 382.

Christ.²⁴⁴ Therefore, the church-community holds a special dual vicarious representation for the world where the world can witness ultimate reality.

Robin Lovin emphasises the importance of these mandates for Bonhoeffer's theology of responsibility; "Without the mandates, there is no framework of intelligibility to separate what God is saying to us from the mutterings of our own imaginations. Without the mandates, a venture of responsibility is nothing but a desperate gamble that order will somehow emerge from chaos."²⁴⁵ The mandates provide the responsible Christian a structure within which to live responsibly. We also see here that responsibility will "look" different within each mandate. These exist over and against one-another but always in Christ. Accordingly, the Christian life of responsible freedom is not a "spiritual" exercise separate from the world but is lived precisely within the world. The form of Christ shaped within the church-community is one that is *for* the world and so serves within these Christ commanded mandates in a manner that aligns with the person of Christ.

To summarise, the Command of God calls human beings to life lived in Christ as the revealed ultimate reality of God for us and the world. Life is free responsible action that accords with "the very person of Jesus Christ."²⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer encourages us to find God in the very center of human existence as the giver of life. This life is not without limit. Real freedom, as actualised by the Spirit in the church-community, is lived as Christians daily live in the form and presence of Jesus Christ *for* others. Here we honour God by loving and enjoying life to the full,²⁴⁷ and by being found in Jesus Christ who in his very person is the command of God that forms humanity by the Spirit.

²⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 404-405.

²⁴⁵ Robin W. Lovin, "The Mandates in an Age of Globalization," in *Ontology and Ethics*, 24.

²⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 231.

²⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 266.

The Venture of Freedom

To conclude our chapter we will discuss the concrete venture of freedom gifted to human beings in Jesus Christ. We have just seen that for Bonhoeffer the commandment is not primarily a restriction upon human action, but is a permission to live responsibly before God and towards the other. And that “authentic freedom is freedom *from* self, *for* God and *for* others.”²⁴⁸ Real human life is provided in Christ where the human being is free to live courageously *for* others and the world because they are found in Christ who is *for* humanity and the world. By being found in Christ they are being formed by the Spirit into the form of Christ which is a vicarious representative form for others. Christian freedom in the world is not an isolated and individualistic freedom seeking after its own benefit and spoilt with choices that stand before it. Rather, we are free to act for the world, in light of the concrete other, understanding our position within the church-community as Christ concretely present on earth. Even though Christ’s presence is being formed in the church-community, the venture of freedom is not isolated from the community. The church-community is orientated towards the world, it is *for* the world which Christ is reconciling to himself. This means that “genuine Christian responsibility encompasses all activity within the world.”²⁴⁹ Action in accord with this understanding, in accord with this ultimate reality, is responsible freedom. In Bonhoeffer’s words,

To act out of concrete responsibility means to act in *freedom* - to decide, to act, and to answer for the consequences of this particular action *myself* without the support of other people or principles. Responsibility presupposes ultimate freedom in assessing a given situation, in choosing, and in acting. Responsible action is neither determined from the outset nor defined once and for all; instead, it is born in the given situation... One must observe,

²⁴⁸ Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, 84.

²⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 239.

weigh, and judge the matter, all in the dangerous freedom of one's own self.²⁵⁰

This dangerous freedom is the venture of life, to courageously live out of the freedom of being found in Christ. There is nothing set in stone, no defined course of action, and thus any action will flow from the freedom of the individual. This freedom is one that responsibly assesses the concrete circumstance and aligns the free act with the person of Christ being formed in them. To be a human being living responsibly before God is to enjoy life without concerning oneself with every little choice.²⁵¹ As Bonhoeffer says, "there is nothing problematic, tortured, or dark about the living and acting of human beings, but instead something self-evident, joyous, certain, and clear."²⁵² Life is a gift to be enjoyed. The command of God is clear and concise but requires the bold venture of daily living within concrete circumstances and decisions. It requires responsible discernment, alignment with Christ's person, and bold action that is not isolated action but action in Christ.

There will be faith that, to those who humbly ask, God will surely make the divine will known. And then, after all such serious discernment there will also be freedom to make a real decision; in this freedom there will be confidence that it is not the human but the divine will that is accomplished through such discernment.²⁵³

This is the freedom that Bonhoeffer offers the world. This is a freedom that *frees* human beings from the anthropocentric approach to life. Freedom cannot be considered an autonomous possession of each human being. Rather, it is a shared venture of living life as God created it to be in relationship to Him and each other. We are free to be God's creatures, to live life in the freedom of His command Jesus

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 221-222.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 365-366.

²⁵² Ibid., 309.

²⁵³ Ibid., 324.

Christ, who is life present *with* us and *for* us. We are free to live in the “venture of concrete decision.”²⁵⁴

Bonhoeffer offers a fresh theology of freedom that has been built upon Luther’s gospel and the revealed present person of Christ. In the next two chapters we will see how this “freedom for” is congruent with the Pauline vision of daily Christian life which he passionately defends in his epistle to the Galatian church. To this we will now turn our attention.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

Chapter 4. Bonhoeffer and Galatians: Faith and New Creation

Setting the Scene for Hearing Paul

The issue that Paul passionately defends in his polemical epistle to the Galatians is the freedom of the Gospel. But what is this freedom that Paul advocates? And how is it being suppressed by the new teachers from the Jerusalem church? These are the questions we will seek to answer in the next two chapters. I hope to show that Bonhoeffer is a careful reader of Paul, and in fact, sheds new light on the reading of Galatians for the church today. I think that Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom clearly resonates with Paul's vision for the church. In so arguing, I wish to not get burdened by issues superfluous to the focus of our thesis; that being Bonhoeffer's nuanced delineation of freedom and his clear lineage from Paul, through Luther, and its importance for the church today. However, to do this we need to hear Paul's argument in relation to the Sinaitic law, faith, and the apocalyptic Christ; all of which sit within an avalanche of recent Pauline studies, a small portion of which we must humbly navigate.

In 1977 E. P. Sanders published *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in which he argued that the Sinaitic law for first-century Palestinian Jews was not a means of earning salvation as was traditionally believed. This view, termed "covenantal nomism," found that within first-century Judaism, the initiative of salvation was God's in establishing a covenant with his people, and their response was faithful obedience to the law within the covenantal relationship.²⁵⁵ With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the re-examination of Jewish literature, it became evident that Jewish theology was not one of works righteousness based on the careful keeping of the

²⁵⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-6.

law. In other words, works were not a means of salvation, but the required response to God's covenant.

This ground-breaking insight by Sanders birthed new readings of Paul in relation to faith and the law, most famously seen under the title *The New Perspective on Paul*.²⁵⁶ James Dunn suggested that for first-century Jews the law provided the "boundary markers" that identified them as the people of God. These boundary markers were specific socio-cultural laws that were seen as the defining aspects of a covenant faithful Jew and included keeping the fast days, refraining from table fellowship with Gentiles, and the most prominent, circumcision. Simply put, law obedience was important for "staying in" as opposed to "getting in."²⁵⁷ Dunn points out that "In typically Jewish thought to do the works of the law would mean maintaining a social life as far as practically possible apart from the Gentiles."²⁵⁸

Running parallel to the New Perspective is the recent interest in Paul as an apocalyptic theologian. Nearly forty years ago J. Christiaan Beker encouraged the recognition that at the centre of Paul's gospel is an apocalyptic thematic.²⁵⁹ This perspective gained widespread recognition with Louis J. Martyn's commentary on Galatians.²⁶⁰ Not that Paul wrote apocalyptic literature, rather, he viewed the Christ event as an apocalyptic event, in which God has invaded the cosmos and initiated something brand new. I will suggest in the coming discussion that Bonhoeffer's

²⁵⁶ The most well-known New Perspective scholars are Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright. For an overview of the development of Pauline Studies since Sanders see N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 64-131.

²⁵⁷ Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 6.

²⁵⁸ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 78.

²⁵⁹ J. Christiaan Beker, "The Challenge of Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel for the Church Today," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 40.1 (1983): 9.

²⁶⁰ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible 33A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

theology of freedom aligns rather nicely with an apocalyptic reading of Galatians.²⁶¹ For Bonhoeffer, the Christ event is the revelation of ultimate reality, a *new* creation. For one recent apocalyptically motivated New Testament scholar, the death and resurrection of Christ is a “revolutionary transformation of the cosmos... [a] universal breakthrough in salvation history.”²⁶² In other words, Jesus brought about a new creation that need not be compatible with the rules and regulations of the old. For as we will discuss, the Sinaitic law has found its fulfilment in the person of Christ (cf. Matt 5:17-20).

This is the setting within which we will endeavour to hear Paul’s liberating gospel. In this chapter we will discuss the two main themes that run throughout the epistle: the law and faith. From this I will endeavour to show the alignment of Bonhoeffer’s Christological view of ultimate reality with the Pauline apocalyptic gospel, drawing from J. Louis Martyn’s recent work on Paul and Galatians.

The Time of the Law and the Time of Promise

In the second chapter of Galatians Paul unfolds his argument against the Sinaitic law being a means of justification. It is clear that the Jerusalem teachers and Paul both shared the same understanding that the law does not justify (2:15-16). Justification is found in relation to Christ and faith. What seems to be at stake is a secondary aspect of salvation.²⁶³ Yes, we are justified by faith, but then what? The answer for the New Perspective is found in the idea of covenantal nomism. The Christ event fits within

²⁶¹ For more on this thought see Philip G. Ziegler, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer-An Ethics of God’s Apocalypse?” *Modern Theology* 23.4 (October 2007): 579-594.

²⁶² Benjamin Schliesser, “‘Christ-Faith’ as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23-26): A ‘Third View’ on πίστις Χριστοῦ,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38.3 (2016): 284. See also Beker for a concise definition of apocalyptic; Beker, “The Challenge of Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel for the Church Today,” 11.

²⁶³ Francis Watson, “The Triune Divine Identity: Reflections on Pauline God-Language in Disagreement with J. D. G. Dunn,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 80 (2000): 102-103.

the salvation history of Israel where God had acted on behalf of Israel, freeing them from slavery in Egypt, and establishing a covenant with the people. This covenant was based upon the giving of the law, before which they were to choose life or choose death, obedience or rebellion (Deut 30:15-20). Eventually Israel was destroyed and Judah exiled precisely because they did not fulfil their side of the covenant. And so, the first-century Jews had every reason to take very seriously their side of the covenant if they wanted to remain God's people. Yes, Christ's sacrifice brought the forgiveness of sins and restored relationship with Yahweh, but still within this continuing covenant framework.

Why would Paul, after his churches in Galatia received the saving grace of Christ through faith, now not expect these Gentile Christians to live in response to God's justifying grace by fulfilling their side of the covenant and living in obedience to the law? Would this not be the desired response to God's saving act in Christ? In the minds of the new Jerusalem teachers, to be one of God's elect, even after being justified by faith, still required obedience to the law. The proponents of The New Perspective concur except that they argue that there was a misunderstanding regarding certain aspects of the law, the boundary markers, which separated the Jews from the Gentiles.²⁶⁴ The most common of these were circumcision, celebrating special days, and table fellowship with Gentiles (all of which Paul mentions in Galatians, cf. 2:3, 2:12, 4:10 & 5:3). The issue here is not the law but the Jewish understanding of the law. But was Paul's passionate argument really against a misunderstanding in the use of the law?

The issue here is three-fold. First, if the law is needed to be added to faith then justification is not by faith alone. Justification would then require human action as

²⁶⁴ See R. Barry Matlock, "Sins of the Flesh and Suspicious Minds: Dunn's New Theology of Paul," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 72 (1998): 73-77.

well. For Paul, adding the law undoes the work of Christ on our behalf (5:2). Ultimately, it makes Christ secondary to the law.²⁶⁵ The second problem is with splitting the law into different moral or cultural parts, in that Paul does not entertain this idea. For Paul, to obey a part of the law obligates one to obey the entire law (5:3). Paul doesn't compartmentalise the law at all (but he could sum it up in a single command to love your neighbour, cf. 5:14).²⁶⁶ And thirdly, if Paul is just arguing against the boundary markers of the law, and in fact supports the continuance of covenantal law obedience for Gentile Christians, then the only difference between Paul and the Jerusalem teachers, as Francis Watson points out, is that Paul is "proposing a liberal, inclusive, flexible understanding to law-observance."²⁶⁷ Justification by faith is reduced to socio-cultural issues and a continuing of the covenantal theology of maintaining the justifying action of Christ through continued obedience to the law.²⁶⁸ However, in Galatians, Paul is adamant that if the law is required for justification, in any respect, then Christ died for nothing (2:21).

For Paul, the issue at stake is the very freedom of the Christian. For if, he claims, the Gentile believers do what the Jerusalem teachers are asking, they are actually returning to the slavery from which Christ has set them free. They would be rejecting the gracious act of God on their behalf. Martyn explains,

When one identifies as the subject of Galatians "the condition on which Gentiles enter the people of God," one presupposes that Paul is concerned with the specific line of movement along which it is now possible for Gentiles

²⁶⁵ J. Louis Martyn, "A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (London: T&T Clark, 1997), 17.

²⁶⁶ See Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul's Use and Interpretation of a Justification Tradition in Galatians 2.15-21," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28.2 (2005): 199-201.

²⁶⁷ Watson, "The Triune Divine Identity: Reflections on Pauline God-Language in Disagreement with J. D. G. Dunn," 102-103.

²⁶⁸ R. Barry Matlock, "Sins of the Flesh and Suspicious Minds: Dunn's New Theology of Paul," 73-74. Wright suggests Paul is pursuing a renewed covenant with faith as the new "badge of membership." To lose the covenant, for Wright, is to lose the narrative of salvation history. See N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 156.

to transfer from their sinful state to the blessedness of those who are the descendants of Abraham. This possible movement is their own.²⁶⁹

In other words, the question is wrong. The question concurs with that of the Rich Young Ruler, who, coming to Jesus asks, “Good Teacher, what must *I* do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17-27). The answer is that it is impossible for *him* to do anything. The question has as a presupposition an anthropocentric soteriology. Jesus’ reply is that for human beings it is impossible to earn salvation; but with God all things are possible! What the approaches to the law we have discussed so far share in common is that they entail different human approaches, or additions, to justification (cf. 5:4). Martyn again, “From the epistle’s beginning to its end, Paul draws contrasts not between two human alternatives, such as works and faith, but rather between acts done by human beings and acts carried out by God.”²⁷⁰ Paul is trying to move any talk of justification away from human agency and place it totally and firmly in the initiative and outworking of God in Christ. It’s not that the Galatians had come to know God, but that *they had become known by God* (4:9). God is the only active agent in justification.

Martyn argues that, for Paul, sin is not just human transgression, but a cosmic power that imprisoned the created order in “the present evil age” (1:4).²⁷¹ So that even the law had come under the power of Sin.²⁷² Therefore, human action, even if in accord with the law, was under the power of Sin. The Jews understood that the law did not have the power to bring righteousness, and therefore something else was needed. That something else was the faithfulness of Christ as the fulfilment of the promise. And so, Paul can claim that the Jews “were imprisoned and guarded under the

²⁶⁹ J. Louis Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” *Interpretation* 54.3 (2000): 254.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 250.

²⁷¹ See Martyn, *Galatians*, 97. Martyn can talk about “sin” as those human transgressions, however, there is also the supra-human power of “Sin” that has enslaved humanity and creation. This Sin has been overcome in the Christ event. It is this perspective on Sin that I have adopted going forward.

²⁷² Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” 257. See also Martyn, *Galatians*, 32.

law” (3:23). The freeing action of Christ’s faithfulness is the only solution, and therefore, removes the need for the law. Re-submitting to the law, then, turns out to be a rejection of the freedom won in Christ and a return to the yoke of slavery (5:1).

However, was not the law an initiative of God? Why would God give the law if now it is redundant? Paul’s argument in Galatians places the law within the salvation history of Israel for which God had called them, however this salvation history has reached its climax in Christ. To show this Paul connects the Christ event with God’s promise given to Abraham (3:16-29) as opposed to the law given through angels (3:19). The promise was that God would bring a blessing through Abraham’s descendants for the entire world. Israel’s election was never about Israel specifically, but for the universal purposes of God in setting right what had gone wrong. Yes, the law was given as a way to live in covenant with God; however, the punch line of salvation history is that Israel was totally incapable of keeping the law and living faithfully within the covenant. In fact, as already mentioned, Sin as a cosmic power was able to take the law under its control (3:22). Torrance explains what happened with Israel’s relationship to the law well using the story of Cain and Abel; “Cain’s way of approaching God runs against God’s grace, even though it uses God’s gifts.”²⁷³ Israel, under the influence of Sin, used God’s gift of the law in two main directions against grace. First in rebellion, which led to destruction and exile. And secondly, inwardly, which lead to arrogance and self-righteousness. Paul’s view of the law in Galatians is that, even if considered a good gift from God (which Paul explains in his later letter to the Romans, cf. 7:7-25), it has come under the power of the present evil age, namely Sin, and thus is being used inappropriately by human beings as a means that operates against grace. The point here is not anti-Semitic. The

²⁷³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 40.

law is an antinomy to the promise of God, as opposed to antithesis (3:21).²⁷⁴ The law was used by God for a time until the fulfilment of the promise. Israel's history with the law "shut every door that might lead from the human orb to the possession of God's promise, and in *that* way, it played its part in God's plan to make his own entry into the human orb."²⁷⁵ God choose Israel to show the world the impotency of humanity to save themselves, and therefore to set up, in the right time, God's invading act in Christ *for* the world.²⁷⁶

Another obvious connection in Paul's contrast of the law with the promise given to Abraham is that Abraham received the promise in faith before the Sinaitic law was given. Therefore, Abraham and the promise circumvent the law and prioritise faith (3:17-18). And the fulfilment of the promise is the coming of Christ (3:16). God has delivered on his promise in the cosmic Christ event through which the whole world is blessed. In belonging to Christ, church members are heirs of the promise given to Abraham (3:39). The covenant God made with Abraham was one of promise on God's part only. It was God's initiative, and God was going to fulfil it. Abraham was powerless to fulfil the promise, it was only through the miraculous intervention of God that the promise could be fulfilled (cf. Gen 12-22). As Douglas Moo points out, "Promise, by its nature, involves a free and unconstrained decision to commit oneself or specific objects to another. It is this nature of promise that Paul highlights... inheritance cannot be based in the law."²⁷⁷ The fulfilment of the promise has nothing to do with human activity, instead, it has everything to do with the free and gracious movement of God *for* His creation. For Paul, the Christ event has brought the ultimate fulfilment of the promise that God had given to his creation.

²⁷⁴ Martyn, *Galatians*, 358.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 361. *Italic's* original.

²⁷⁶ See Torrance, *Incarnation*, 40.

²⁷⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 232. Moo goes on to say that the law by its nature contradicts the gracious manner in which God blesses.

The time of the law is over and the time of promise has arrived. Therefore, Paul can say that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything” (6:15). The law is irrelevant within the new creation that the fulfilled promise has made real. It is God’s freedom revealed in Christ *for* the world that brings the inheritance of the promise in the new creation.

We have seen that Paul’s argument, running through the entire letter, is that justification has absolutely nothing to do with human agency. This is the revelation that drove Luther to seek reform within the church. If Paul’s opposition was the law, Luther’s was the way the church “added” extras to salvation. Yet both men were arguing for the same gracious gospel of God’s saving act in Christ alone. Creation is rectified²⁷⁸ through the Christ event, that is cosmic in scale, where God has acted to set things right. An apocalyptic reading of Paul confirms that there is nothing anthropocentric in Paul’s gospel. The gospel is the good news of God’s “liberating invasion of the cosmos.”²⁷⁹ Paul’s issue with the Jerusalem teachers is that they are trying to return the Gentile Christians in Galatia to a reality that has been circumvented by the Christ event. Getting this wrong equates to returning to slavery and therefore losing freedom.

Bonhoeffer agrees, “The law has been overcome once and for all.”²⁸⁰ The only law now, for Bonhoeffer, is the law of Christ (cf. 6:2), which is freedom seen in the venture of responsibility.²⁸¹ The Christ event has removed the Christian from under the law and placed them within the realm of creative freedom that aligns with the

²⁷⁸ Martyn’s use of “rectify” language instead of justification language is to make this point that it is totally God’s act and has cosmic implications. See Joshua B. Davis, “Introduction: The challenge of Apocalyptic to Modern Theology,” in *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and Beyond J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Harink (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 38.

²⁷⁹ Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” 255.

²⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931*, DBWE 10, 367.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

person of Christ being formed within them. For Paul, the law was unable to produce life, unlike the promise of the Spirit, which surely informs Bonhoeffer's statement that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (cf. 2 Cor 3:6).²⁸² Bonhoeffer, Luther, and Paul share the truth of the gospel in that grace is the action of God *for* humanity in the Christ event. This grace, for Bonhoeffer, "condemns all human effort to reach God as the attempt of man to be like God, as justification by works, by ethics, by religion."²⁸³ Grace is the free action of God *for* his creation, and specifically *for* human beings. It is no longer grace if it is conditional upon human endeavour. Grace is totally opposed to fallen humanity and yet totally *for* fallen humanity.

The Invasion of Faith

In Pauline studies the interpretation of Paul's phrase *pistis Christou* has received considerable attention. The two main translations are "faith in Christ" and the "faith of Christ."²⁸⁴ What is at stake is the issue of human agency. If justification rests upon the human being placing their faith *in* Christ then could this be considered a work? And if so, is this an autonomous decision made possible because of human freedom?²⁸⁵ Alternatively, if the human being is saved by the faith *of* Christ, they are not adding works to the equation. As we have discussed, the rectifying act of God in Jesus Christ is all encompassing in that He initiates and completes the rectification offered to humanity. The "faith *of* Christ" does fit better with our interpretation of

²⁸² Ibid., 368.

²⁸³ Ibid., 449.

²⁸⁴ The debate is a well known one between Richard Hays and James D. G. Dunn. Martinus de Boer offers a concise description of both sides of the debate, himself eventually siding with the subjective genitive, see de Boer, "Paul's Use and Interpretation of a Justification Tradition in Galatians 2.15-21," 201-203.

²⁸⁵ See Martyn, "The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians," 251. Martyn makes this point when discussing the "circular exchange" within what he calls the doctrine of the Two Ways based on the covenant offered to Israel to choose life or death (Deut 30:19). Approaching the gospel in this way (as he argues do the Jerusalem teachers), means God's grace creates the possibility for the human being to autonomously choose. This he sees as non-congruent with Paul's argument in Galatians.

Paul's major underlying polemic against anthropocentrism. A third way of interpretation has been suggested by Benjamin Schliesser, where faith is read as an "eschatological event."²⁸⁶ "Now before faith came" (3:23), and "now that faith has come" (3:25), both read as invasive movements from the outside. We see here that faith itself has come and invaded the world. The coming of faith from somewhere "outside" has brought the fulfilment of the promise first given to Abraham which includes the universal scope of *all* humanity. Quite possibly, as an eschatological event, faith has the potential to include all interpretations of Paul's Greek. As Hays explains, faith "is not an univocal concept for Paul."²⁸⁷ We see in Galatians that faith is intimately connected with the person of Christ; faith is his coming, his faithfulness, and the faith he elicits within human beings (cf. 1:23, 2:16, 3:2, 3:14, 3:23).²⁸⁸ As we discussed earlier, Luther proposes three powers of faith that situate faith within a relational context with the person of Christ who forms faith within the human heart.²⁸⁹ In all these Christ is the active agent and therefore human faith is the Spirit's action in us (3:14).

Paul's bold claim is that the era of the law is over and that the time of faith has arrived. Christ brings faith into the world and in doing so initiates a whole new creation. Bonhoeffer is clear, "Christ alone creates faith."²⁹⁰ Faith then becomes something that human beings are able to participate in as opposed to being required to provide. Faith is an active part of the cosmic invasion shown by Christ's own faithfulness that elicits faith within human beings. Martyn clarifies, "God's rectifying act... is no more God's response to human faith in Christ than it is God's response to human observance of the law. God's rectification is not God's response at all. It is the

²⁸⁶ Schliesser, "Christ-Faith as an Eschatological Event," 277.

²⁸⁷ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 174.

²⁸⁸ See Martyn, *Galatians*, 362.

²⁸⁹ See pages 36-39 above.

²⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 167.

first move; it is God's initiative, carried out by him in Christ's faithful death."²⁹¹ Therefore, neither law observance or human faith rectify a person before God.²⁹² And in fact, the faith of the human being is itself a gift provided by the cosmic invasion of faith. Under the power of Sin everything the human being does is tainted. Humanity is imprisoned and enslaved under the power of Sin,²⁹³ that is, until faith came! This faith that comes to the human being is Christ himself who enables the human person to live in faith as they live in Christ. Martinus de Boer suggests that in this apocalyptic reading "faith functions as a metonym for Christ," that is, faith is "something that belongs to or defines Christ himself."²⁹⁴ Faith has, for Paul, a Christological form.²⁹⁵ The new creation is founded upon a thoroughly Christological reality that has invaded and overcome the world that was imprisoned under the power of Sin but now lives within the realm of faith.

Bonhoeffer's description of faith deserves to be quoted at length:

Faith means to find, hold to, and cast my anchor on this foundation and so to be held by it. Faith means to base life on a foundation outside myself, on an eternal and holy foundation, on Christ. Faith means to be captivated by the gaze of Jesus Christ; one sees nothing but him. Faith means to be torn out of the imprisonment in one's own ego, liberated by Jesus Christ. Faith is letting something happen, and only therein is it an activity... faith alone is certainty; everything outside of faith is subject to doubt. Jesus Christ alone is the certainty of faith. I believe the Lord Jesus Christ who tells me that my life is justified. So there is no way toward the justification of my life other than faith alone.... my life is justified only by that which belongs to Christ and never by what is mine. So heaven is torn open above us humans, and the joyful message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ rings out from heaven to earth as a

²⁹¹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 271.

²⁹² Martyn, "The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians," 250.

²⁹³ Martyn, *Galatians*, 362. Martyn explains that from 3:23 onwards Paul is speaking not just of the Jews and the Gentile church in Galatia, but of humanity as a whole, shown by the change to his use of "we".

²⁹⁴ de Boer, "Paul's Use and Interpretation of a Justification Tradition in Galatians 2.15-21," 203.

²⁹⁵ Moo, *Galatians*, 242.

cry of joy. I believe, and in believing I receive Christ, I have everything. I live before God.²⁹⁶

One gets the impression that Bonhoeffer is not so concerned with the genitive subjective/objective argument regarding faith! Faith for Bonhoeffer is Christ active within us, bringing us into the new reality which is Christ revealed and present as the church-community.

A Religionless Faith

From our reading of Galatians discussed so far, Paul's problem, in Bonhoeffer's terms, is that human beings are living under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In this fallen reality the law becomes the method of discerning the good. Even the law, which in itself was not evil, was distorted by Sin and became an anthropocentric tool for appeasing God so as to obtain salvation, or at least the practice of adding human works to the justifying action of God in Christ. Bonhoeffer claims that "God has founded his church beyond religion and beyond ethics."²⁹⁷ Ethics will be the focus of the next chapter. For now we can note that both Martyn and Bonhoeffer use the term religion as referring to the human enterprise of reaching for God.²⁹⁸ Martyn argues that in Galatians we "see repeatedly, that the ruling polarity is rather the cosmic antinomy of God's apocalyptic act in Christ versus religion, and thus the gospel versus religious tradition."²⁹⁹ It is this perspective on religion that leads Bonhoeffer to read Paul as follows: "The Pauline question of whether [circumcision] is a condition of justification is today, in my opinion, the

²⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 147-148.

²⁹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 117. Quoted in Christopher Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes: Rehearing the Gospel as Good News* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 88.

²⁹⁸ See Martyn, *Galatians*, 37, fn 67. Also Martyn, "Galatians, An Anti-Judaic Document?" in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 79.

²⁹⁹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 37.

question of whether religion is a condition for salvation. Freedom from [circumcision] is also freedom from religion.”³⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer is taking the movement of the gracious gospel of Christ and asking, “What does it mean today?” For Bonhoeffer, the opposition that the gospel faced was the anthropocentric religion of his era and culture. The church wanted religion, but it was without Christ and the promises made to Israel. For Luther, it was the selling of indulgences and the adding of works to faith, the covenantal soteriology prevalent at the time. These three theologians all captured the Christological emphasis of the gospel of grace and faith alone. It is Christ alone who saves, and it is the faith that issues from the apocalyptic event of Christ that rectifies and initiates the new reality of the new creation; a reality determined by faith and the Spirit of Christ that is witnessed in the church-community (cf. 5:5, 16).

The church-community is called to be passive in the sense that no human action is able to provide self-based confidence before God. Confidence for the Christian is found only in the fact that God had proven himself to be faithful in the Christ event, provided forgiveness, and raised us anew in Christ. The new creation is found in the person of Christ: “As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ” (3:27). To be clothed with Christ is to be *in* Christ. Our sinful flesh is crucified with Christ and we are raised anew in Christ (cf. 2:19-20). Paul had been crucified *with* Christ, meaning he had died to the “present evil age” and all that went with it (i.e. the law) and was raised anew in Christ, in the new creation. Paul’s life is united with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.³⁰¹ For Paul, the church is cruciform in essence,³⁰² dying to human desire (i.e. the flesh), and living in Christ, that is, in the Spirit. This is the new reality established by the invading cosmic

³⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 365-366.

³⁰¹ de Boer “Paul’s Use and Interpretation of a Justification Tradition in Galatians 2.15-21,” 213.

³⁰² See Christopher R. J. Holmes, “The Spirit and the Promise: On Becoming Aligned with the Way Things Really Are,” in *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology*, 222.

rectification of faith upon the world. Dying and rising, for Paul, is not just a metaphor but a reality of the new creation. The new creation is a Christological reality that surpasses any “religion” governed by an anthropocentric soteriology. Life in the apocalyptic time of faith is determined by the form of Christ becoming real in the world by the work of the Spirit.

Things that can cause division within the world (like religion, gender, and social standing), are overcome as Christians are united in the person of Christ (3:28). Martyn shares the ecclesiological insight with Bonhoeffer that church members “are not one thing; they are one person.”³⁰³ For Bonhoeffer the church-community is Christ present. The human being in the church-community, even though an individual person, can now only see themselves as in Christ. There is a diversity of individuals that now see Christ in each other and themselves as the present body of Christ united by the Spirit. The defining aspect of who they are, and how they live day to day as a community, is now solely defined by the person of Christ who is being formed within them by the Spirit (4:19). As Paul has argued, the law (and therefore religion), has no residence within Christ’s church-community; a community that is shaped by the gracious invasion of faith that initiated the new creation in the Spirit. The new reality is Christ present as his church. Religion, as an anthropocentric path to God, has been destroyed. Religion in this sense belongs to the by-gone age allowing Bonhoeffer to claim that “Jesus calls not to a new religion but to life.”³⁰⁴ The new creation is one of faith as seen and shared in Jesus Christ, who is himself Life.

³⁰³ Martyn, *Galatians*, 377

³⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 482.

The captivating thing about religion is that it provides confidence in ourselves and places God in our debt.³⁰⁵ Faithful obedience to the law enabled some of the first-century Jews to believe they had the monopoly on God. They could decide who was in or out. They could set the rules and enforce obedience. They could boast in being close to God. People could actually be fighting against the work of God all the while thinking they were doing God's work! This was Paul's story (1:13-14). He had every right to boast in his success in the field of religion (cf. 2 Cor 11-12, Phil 4:6-7). Yet Paul says he will only boast in the cross of Christ on which he himself has been crucified (6:14). Nothing that had happened outside of the Christ event had any importance to Paul. Christ was the center of his life. His entire theological vision for life and the new creation is a Christological vision. It was the grace of God (1:15) and the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:12) that awakened Paul. I am confident Paul would agree with Bonhoeffer who claims, "It is God's deed that is important... we wanted to be masters of the eternal and now we are its slaves. Only one means of rescue remains, namely, God's path, and that means grace... God's path to human beings, that is the sum total of Christianity."³⁰⁶

Bonhoeffer and Apocalyptic

We have seen sufficient similarity in Bonhoeffer's theological work and Martyn's apocalyptic reading of Paul to suggest that Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom has something important to say in regard to hearing Paul today. Bonhoeffer provides a unique Christological emphasis that can build upon an apocalyptic reading of Paul's letter to the Galatians. Philip Ziegler concurs, suggesting that Bonhoeffer has a "whole way of thinking" where the "organising logic is very closely aligned with

³⁰⁵ Martyn, "The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians," 248.

³⁰⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931*, DBWE 10, 483.

that of Paul's apocalyptic gospel."³⁰⁷ I think his poetic description of the Christ event would bring approving nods from proponents of apocalyptic: "The dark tunnel of human life, which was barred within and without and was disappearing ever more deeply into an abyss from which there is no exit, is powerfully torn open; the word of God bursts in... the labyrinth of their previous lives collapses."³⁰⁸ The Christ event changed the cosmos in a way that brings a divide between the old and the new, the penultimate and the ultimate. The Christ event revealed the ultimate reality of Jesus Christ present in the new creation of the church-community.

The distinctions of the "old world order," so to speak, have been overcome. There is no longer an antithesis between Jew or Gentile, slave and free, male and female (3:28). This new reality Paul calls the new creation (6:15). We would be mistaken to think Paul's argument in Galatians is about circumcision, for in conclusion Paul is disinterested in this antithesis and concerned solely with the new creation and faith (5:6). God has established a new creation through the Christ event and delivered faithfully on his promise to set his creation free from slavery to "the evil world" (1:4). In the new creation, Christ is central, for everything finds its unity within Christ. The power of Sin has been destroyed and members of the new creation should not revert back to living under a law which itself was under the power of Sin. "Paul is not at all formulating an argument designed to persuade the Galatians that faith is better than observance of the Law," claims Martyn, "He is constructing an announcement designed to wake the Galatians up to the real cosmos, made what it is by the fact that faith has now *arrived* with the advent of Christ."³⁰⁹ The object of faith has arrived and established a new creation, a new reality. This reality is established and

³⁰⁷ Philip G. Ziegler, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer-An Ethics of God's Apocalypse?" *Modern Theology* 23.4 (October 2007): 588.

³⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 146.

³⁰⁹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 23. Italics original.

found in the person of Christ who was crucified and raised for humanity and the world.

The Christ event is God's act of grace par-excellence. Grace has broken into the world and turned the ways of the world on its head. Grace is totally foreign to the human being and yet is provided for the human being because the bringer of grace became human. This coming grace, which in itself is a continual coming,³¹⁰ is the fulfilment of God's promise and plan and is total, complete, and all effective. The effect of rectification upon the sinner is by grace alone, by the invading and saving act of God *for* creation. This grace lavished upon the human being releases faith.

The apocalyptic break from penultimate to ultimate is evident in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* manuscripts. The event of justification for the sinner "involves a complete break with everything penultimate."³¹¹ Bonhoeffer uses the differing "ways" of Paul and Luther in regard to the law as an example of the failure of the law: Paul being blameless in the law, with so much zeal for the law that it eventually put him in opposition to God; and Luther, as a young monk, broken by the impossibility of pleasing God via the law.³¹² These two examples frame the impossibility of the human way to God. The "way" is only the revealing of the ultimate word, Jesus Christ, *for* the world and *for* me. Everything penultimate is laid waste (including the law) before the revelation of faith that Christ *is* and *gives* to the children of God. "It is Christ's way to us that must be prepared, not our way to Christ; and Christ's way can only be prepared in full awareness that it is precisely Christ who must prepare it."³¹³

³¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931*, DBWE 10, 450.

³¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 149.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 167.

An accusation against an apocalyptic reading of Paul's theology is that it creates a dualism reminiscent of classical philosophy³¹⁴ or falls into the Marcion error.³¹⁵ Bonhoeffer however speaks of the antinomy that is brought together and is resolved in the person of Christ.³¹⁶ Accordingly, he argues that the ultimate, the new creation, does not entail the destruction of the old. Christ has brought about the new, however, the new encompasses the old within itself. The two extreme approaches are explained by Bonhoeffer as radicalism and compromise. The radical approach only sees the ultimate and therefore everything penultimate is in enmity to Christ.³¹⁷ With compromise, the ultimate is disconnected with daily life, being only a spiritual, other worldly idea. Both perspectives contain truth and yet when taken to the extreme produce error. In Christ, the ultimate and the penultimate become one.³¹⁸ Christianity cannot become a private affair concerned solely with eternal salvation, thus rejecting the world to judgement and destruction. Rather, God's reality and human reality are united in the God-man Jesus Christ. An apocalyptic reading of Bonhoeffer cannot fall into the radical distinction of the "evil age" and "new age." Yes, they are distinct, but they have been brought together in the gracious and rectifying Christ event. The Christian is "other worldly" but only when they live *in* this world. For "Christian life is participation in Christ's encounter with the world."³¹⁹ Paul would sum up this encounter as participation in the dying and rising of Christ. Bonhoeffer sees in Paul a man who "lost his life to Christ, and now Christ became his life."³²⁰ To participate *in* Christ is to participate in his cruciform nature as

³¹⁴ See Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 157-158.

³¹⁵ Martyn explains that Marcion's error was to read the Pauline passages as polar opposites, as in strict antithesis. These should be seen, however, as "dynamic, apocalyptic antinomies." See Martyn, "A Tale of Two Churches," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 34.

³¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 157. Joshua Davis praises Martyn's "repudiation of dualism" transforming a more traditional understanding of apocalyptic. See Davis, "Introduction: The challenge of Apocalyptic to Modern Theology," in *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology*, 42.

³¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 153.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

the church-community. We die to ourselves and live for Christ. Which means we die to the world and yet live *for* the world. Rectification is not an escape, it drives the human person all the more deeply into the world that God loves. Ultimate reality is Christ revealed within which the church-community is called to participate.

Within the risen Christ the new humanity is borne, the final, sovereign Yes of God to the new human being. Humanity still lives, of course, in the old, but is already beyond the old. Humanity still lives, of course, in a world of death, but is already beyond death. Humanity still lives, of course, in a world of sin, but we are already beyond sin. The night is not yet over, but the day is already dawning.³²¹

The question now becomes, what is expected from those who are in Christ? If the law is no more, and the time of faith has arrived, how are the church members expected to live concretely in everyday life? For Paul, a new enemy has risen. In the new creation, the antithesis is between the flesh and the Spirit. Paul's argument against nomism in Galatians is not grounded in an antinomian vision. The antithesis between these is overcome by the law of Christ (6:2), which is the freedom to act in Christian responsibility before God and for the world. It is Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom and its concrete ethical implications that I believe will add to our hearing of Galatians today. Therefore, our focus in the next chapter is the place of ethics in the apocalyptic gospel of Galatians.

³²¹ Ibid., 92.

Chapter 5. Bonhoeffer and Galatians: The Free Christian

In chapter five of Paul's epistle to the Galatians we see a shift in focus. After establishing his argument that the time of faith has arrived with the invasive act of God in Jesus Christ, an act that relinquished the law to a by-gone era, Paul sets his sights on the daily life of the church-community living in faith.³²² It is highly probable that the Jerusalem teachers were providing the Sinaitic law as a means of expected daily living for Gentile converts.³²³ If, however, Paul refuses to allow the Sinaitic law to govern daily behaviour, what does he propose? Providing a "code of conduct" would run the risk of creating a new law that could be used anthropocentrically and in opposition to the movement of grace. What we find, however, is that Paul envisions a people living by faith in the formative action of God within them as a community.

There are two verses in Galatians that inform this chapter and provide a window into the Pauline vision for daily life: "Until Christ is *formed* in you" (4:19) and "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love *become slaves to one another*" (5:13). Paul does not want to create a "new" law (even a law based on Christ's teachings), but a new way of living within the freedom delivered by the arrival of the new creation in Christ. The apocalyptic invasion of faith has revealed the ultimate reality in which human beings live, and where daily life is being formed into a Christologically shaped freedom *for* others and before God.

I believe Bonhoeffer captures Paul's intent with his statement that the Christian "who claims to have experienced grace and then becomes nomistic or antinomian -

³²² Martyn, *Galatians*, 480-481.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 481.

that [they have] not really experienced grace!”³²⁴ Bonhoeffer sees Paul inviting the church into a radically new way of living that is neither nomistic or antinomian; the former attempts to justify oneself before God, while the other justifies action by taking the place of God. The concrete question for the Christian in daily life is not “what should or ought I do?” Rather, “what is the will of God today?” Bonhoeffer has argued that the will of God is revealed and realized in the ultimate reality of Jesus Christ. And therefore, since the invasive Christ event “ethics can be concerned with only one thing: to partake in the reality of the fulfilled will of God.”³²⁵ What I wish to show in this chapter is how Bonhoeffer offers a concrete Christian ethic that is in alignment with a robust apocalyptic understanding of Galatians. Daily life for the Christian is found in the Christological reality of the new creation being made real through the work of the Spirit within the church-community; a community that is *for* the other and *for* the world.

The Flesh and the Spirit

For Paul, the old-world order has been crucified with Christ, and therefore, so were the antinomies of that time. The Christian now lives in the freedom rendered by the gracious and invasive act of God in Christ; and yet, there is still the possibility of this freedom being used for “self-indulgence” (5:13), or regressive submission “to a yoke of slavery” (5:1). This is possible if the Christian allows the “desires of the flesh” to direct behaviour (5:16-17). Martyn’s apocalyptic reading of Galatians understands the “Flesh” as being an apocalyptic power that is working against God in the new creation.³²⁶ Simply, the Flesh works in opposition to the Spirit. There is a battle that wages within the Christian between the power of the Flesh, and what the Spirit is

³²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931*, DBWE 10, 449.

³²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 74.

³²⁶ Martyn, *Galatians*, 485-486.

doing. The invasive act of God initiated a battle against those powers that took creation under its control. Those powers are summed up as the Flesh, and the Flesh is overcome by the Spirit of Christ.³²⁷

Paul, however, does not provide an outline on how to combat the Flesh. The Flesh belongs to the “evil age” that has been overcome in the Christ event. The Flesh is that which is attempting to pull the new human being in Christ back under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Under this tree, life is defined by the nomistic/antinomian antinomy that has been overcome in Christ. For Paul, the works of the Flesh are obvious, cf. 5:19-21. He does not lay down a list of “do nots” so as to protect the church from mistakenly succumbing to the Flesh. This would run the risk of creating a new “law.”³²⁸ The new community under faith is no longer subjected to the question between good and evil for human action, and so Paul’s answer to the influence of the Flesh is to encourage the Christian to “stand firm” in the freedom found in Christ. The Christian is not faced with the ethical choice between a fleshly or spiritual action; rather, in faith, they remain in the freedom of the new creation. They understand that they now live within the new creation, they are in Christ, and therefore being led by the Spirit of Christ.

The Flesh wants to regain control and return the human being to the anthropocentric approach to life. Here the freedom rendered by Christ falls victim to selfish desire and comes under the power of Sin. The Flesh will attempt to either return to the law as in Paul’s day, or create a new law as in Luther’s day. The Flesh wants to trust in itself and find confidence in itself. The Flesh is attempting to justify itself (5:4). Martyn points out that the list of fleshly works provided in Galatians is a description

³²⁷ Martyn, *Galatians*, 493.

³²⁸ Holmes, “The Spirit and the Promise,” in *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology*, 230.

of a community that is not living in the freedom of the gospel.³²⁹ The Flesh destroys community life.³³⁰ The works of the Flesh listed in 5:19-21, is a picture of broken community life, which is the result of individuals using freedom *for* themselves.

In the reality of the new creation, the Christian lives under the Tree of Life where the will of God is the center and limit for human life. For Paul, life in the new creation is defined by the Spirit at work within the freedom won by Christ. It is the Spirit that produces “fruit” within the church-community. Such things as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control” cannot be manufactured by law, and “there is no law against such things” (5:22-23). Rather, this is a relational vision for the life of a community that is being formed by the Spirit. Paul informs the Galatian church that the Spirit brings these things into being; this is not a “to do” list. Life in the Spirit is life that is “guided” by the Spirit (5:25) as opposed to law, universal principles, or ethical ideals. The Spirit is at work within the community, forming the community into the form of Christ. The freedom of the church is not the ability to discern the will of God and then act in alignment. The will of God is already realised in the revealed person of Christ.³³¹ And Christ is present and active in the Spirit forming the church into the form of Christ (cf. Rom 12:1-2). The will of God is that Christ be made real in the world and it is only the promised Spirit that “has the power to bring about the kind of life that is in accord with the way things really are.”³³²

The form of Christ is the form of the crucified. The Spirit fights against the Flesh by forming the Christian into the form of the crucified Christ. The Spirit is the “Spirit of the crucified Christ” and provides victory over the Flesh through the community’s

³²⁹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 484.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 486.

³³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 74.

³³² Holmes, “The Spirit and the Promise,” 220.

“corporate participation in the cross.”³³³ It is only the cross that has victory over the Flesh and over the powers of Sin. The church-community has “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (5:24). To “live by the Spirit” (5:16,25) is to allow the Spirit to conform our daily lives into the form of the crucified Christ. Therefore, Paul can claim, “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (6:14). Daily life is positioned and flows from the understanding that we are crucified with Christ. When Paul encourages the church-community to live in the Spirit he means to live in a “cruciform existence.”³³⁴ The cross, by the power of the Spirit, shapes our daily interactions with others and before God by crucifying the Flesh. Bonhoeffer concurs, “They thus are filled with a new knowledge in which the knowledge of good and evil has been overcome... They now no longer know anything but Jesus Christ the crucified.”³³⁵ Paul claims this himself in the first epistle to the Corinthians, writing, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). In this way the Flesh is overcome and the Christian is able to live in the freedom of the gospel.

The cross was for Paul the defining reality of life in the new creation in a way that delivers the reality of the new creation within the daily life of the church-community. The Jerusalem teachers that were preaching circumcision had lost their focus on the cross. Their insistence regarding circumcision proved, for Paul, that they were influenced by the Flesh as opposed to the cross of Christ (6:12-14). The Spirit is active in making the cross real in the lives of the crucified church-community. It is only through the cross that the Flesh is overcome (5:24).

³³³ Martyn, *Galatians*, 501.

³³⁴ Holmes, “The Spirit and the Promise,” 222.

³³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 317.

The Law of Christ

For Paul, to live in the reality of the new creation one lives *for* the other in a way not subject to any law (5:18), except the “law of Christ” (6:2, cf. 1 Cor 9:21). What does Paul mean by his use of this term? Galatians has been a compelling argument against the Sinaitic law, and, in fact, any kind of law. In 5:14 we see Paul claiming that “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, love your neighbour as yourself.” Martyn explains that the law in its entirety is not “done” by loving your neighbour, but is “fulfilled.”³³⁶ The law has been fulfilled by Christ and therefore everyone found *in* Christ shares in the fulfilment of the law.³³⁷ Yes the law is important to the daily life of the church, but only as it rests in the hands of Christ who fulfilled it by being *for the world* in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection - “the law is permanently secondary to Christ.”³³⁸ The law of Christ works *for* the concrete neighbour in love. Where Sin had taken the law of God and used it for selfish purposes in the hands of humanity, Christ fulfils the law in obedience to the Father and in loving the other. The law then is not separate from Christ but *is in* Christ. The action and being of Christ are one. He fulfils the command of God because he *is* the command of God. The form of Christ is the law incarnate.

The law is useless in the hands of sinners. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the law, as it belonged to the “evil age,” was something able to be taken control of by human beings and “done” in isolation from one another. In the new creation, brought about by the apocalyptic act of God, the law only exists within relationships that exist in Christ, and therefore have the form of being towards the other. And so we can say that the law of Christ is the form of Christ coming into being in the church-community. The law of Christ, therefore, is the Christological reality

³³⁶ Martyn, *Galatians*, 487.

³³⁷ See Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935-1937*, DBWE 14, 336-337. Bonhoeffer states that the Christian finds themselves not under the law but “in the law.”

³³⁸ See Martyn, *Galatians*, 513.

becoming real. It is never nomistic. Nomism is impersonal and true reality is a person, the God who became human in Jesus Christ. And likewise, the law of Christ can never be antinomic because Christ as the truth fulfilled the law and continues to fulfil the law in the formation of his present being on earth in the church-community.

We see a biblical example in Paul's dealing with the law of circumcision, in that circumcision is not really the issue at all. In a radical proclamation from a committed Jew, Paul says that circumcision, which was a defining aspect of his culture and religion, now means nothing to him because he is in Christ (5:6). Whether someone is circumcised or not is irrelevant, what matters now is the new creation (6:15). This, however, does not mean that Paul would deny circumcision to a Jew. Paul is adamant that his Greek companion Titus did not need to be circumcised (2:3), and yet the book of Acts informs us that Paul has Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). Is Paul inconsistent? Not at all. Paul has risen above the "law" and is living out of the freedom of the gospel. Circumcision is not a law which *needs* to be followed. Paul is not antinomian nor nomistic; rather, Paul is free to approach circumcision within the concrete circumstance and the concrete neighbour in Christ. For Titus, it was an issue of justification, and the use of religion in justification, that was at stake. For Timothy, it was Timothy's Jewish heritage and the work they were doing amongst the Jews that influenced the decision to circumcise the young man. The actions of Paul in these regards are not driven by nomistic or antinomic use of the law, but by the freedom found in Christ *for* others; put simply, by the law of Christ.

This type of free action is explained by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from

God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor 9:19-23).

We see here Jesus' essence of being *for* others directing the daily life and relationships of Paul's "today." The directing factor for Paul is the form of Christ being *for* others becoming real in his life. For Paul, this is being under Christ's law.

Paul's use of the term "slave" in this passage is congruent with his encouragement to the Galatians to "become slaves to one another" (5:13). For Paul, real freedom is a freedom *for* that is so radical that he can compare it to being a slave of the other. He gives his life to serve the other, because the other is actually Christ. He understands that his action is a communal action and affects the others within the church-community (cf. 1 Cor 6:15-20, 12:26). Paul has been crucified with Christ and is raised into the body of Christ present as the church-community. His personhood is essential to this community and the relations as such. And therefore, he is a slave to the body of Christ, which is, a slave to the *other*. Paul's daily life is not dictated by the Sinaitic law, or some moral guide, but by the present reality of being in Christ, who is the concrete other in the situation at hand. Freedom in Christ is *freedom for* and is only real freedom when it is found in the concrete and real relationships of today. Real freedom is enslaved to the other in that if we try to remove the other, that is, the *for-ness* of freedom, we lose freedom all together.

Freedom for Paul is not the autonomous individual exercising free will. In the true reality of Christ "there is no such thing as an autonomously free will... freedom that is both true and sufficiently powerful to stand the test of daily life is also 'freedom for,' and specifically freedom for the service of the neighbour."³³⁹ In fact, "Paul

³³⁹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 486.

speaks of the freeing of the will for the glad service of God and neighbour."³⁴⁰ Freedom is found only in relation to the other, and therefore only in the community of the real human being Jesus Christ. Paul does not envision an individual living a free life, but a community of individuals being formed into the present person of Christ, who is *for* the other. Freedom for Paul is essentially social and therefore enslaved to relationships. Real freedom does not exist outside of relationship. In one of Bonhoeffer's last letters he writes, "The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable to us, but the neighbour within reach in any given situation. God in human form."³⁴¹ This was a premise Bonhoeffer carried through his entire theological career, writing in his doctoral dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*, "The I comes into being only in relation to the you."³⁴² It is in the concrete relationship where human beings act in responsible freedom, that "the human person is created as a real person."³⁴³ Human beings only really exist in the concrete relationships of daily life where the Spirit is actively conforming the Christian into the crucified form of Christ, seen concretely as self-denial and acting *for* the other out of responsible freedom.

Formation

In the *Ethics* manuscripts, Bonhoeffer builds upon Paul's vision of the Spirit forming his church into the form of Christ: "Formation occurs only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ, by being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified, and is risen."³⁴⁴ This is, Bonhoeffer suggests, "the starting

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 271, fn. 173.

³⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 501.

³⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, DBWE 1, 54.

³⁴³ See Gregor, "Shame and the Other," in *Ontology and Ethics*, 83. See also Tietz, "Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church," in *Ontology and Ethics*, 39.

³⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 93.

point of Christian ethics.”³⁴⁵ Ethics in daily life becomes, not a concern of religion, right or wrong, or law in any form, but the person of Christ becoming real among his people through the forming presence of the Spirit. What God is doing in the new creation is seen first and foremost in the church-community being conformed to the form of Jesus Christ revealed. This is not to say that human beings become “imitations or repetitions of Christ,” but that they actually are in Christ, present in reality. They do not become gods, but truly human, because Christ has taken the form of the new humanity.³⁴⁶ The daily life of the church, of the new human being in Christ, is first and foremost found in the conformation of human beings into the real human being Jesus Christ who is crucified and risen. “The church is *nothing* but that piece of humanity where Christ really has taken form.”³⁴⁷ To speak of human action in the new creation is to speak of “how Christ may take form among us today and here.”³⁴⁸

Again, we are not talking about a kind of exemplarism.³⁴⁹ The church does not create a new law designed to make us more like Jesus. “No method leads to this end, only faith.”³⁵⁰ The Jesus of Bonhoeffer is present in a way that evokes action in accordance with who He is. Formation is not a human activity; rather, “Christ remains the only one who forms.”³⁵¹ It is the Spirit of Christ who is forming the church-community into the form of Christ present here and now. This means the form of Christ is present in each day and situation anew. Timeless principles and universal laws succumb to the presence of the Truth at work in His body through the Spirit. In other words, formation is not something that human beings do, but something that is

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 97. Italics mine.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

being done to them. It is not ideal but *real*, in that the form of Christ happens to them: "The real world is said to be Christ taking form in all things."³⁵² In the "time of faith," which has invaded the world, we let "something happen, and only therein is it an activity."³⁵³

We must not forget that freedom and formation is universal in scope for Bonhoeffer. The freedom of the church-community cannot and does not exist for itself. Bonhoeffer's mandates, as commanded by Christ, are the place where the world participates in the *real* world.³⁵⁴ Through the mandates the world is being provided order in alignment with the person of Christ. Just as the Spirit forms the church, so the Spirit also draws the world into the form of Christ. The reality is that the new creation has begun in Christ, the new human, and this is witnessed in the church-community which is being conformed into the humanity of Christ via the Spirit. And yet the whole world is found in the reality of Christ also, irrespective of whether it knows it or not. Morse explains that, for Bonhoeffer, Jesus Christ is today "God's life socially embodied and formative communally in what is now taking place that spans all creation and is not confined religiously simply to those who may say, 'Lord, Lord.'"³⁵⁵

The church is the form meant for all humanity, in that "what takes place in the church happens vicariously and representatively as a model for all human beings."³⁵⁶ Religion, as Kessler points out, has the "tenancy to divide," whereas Bonhoeffer calls the church-community to "embrace the whole reality" because they

³⁵² Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes*, 92.

³⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 148.

³⁵⁴ Jeremy K. Kessler, "Bonhoeffer on Law-Breaking: A Reassessment of the Ethical Exception to the Divine Command," in *Ontology and Ethics*, 104.

³⁵⁵ Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes*, 91.

³⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 97.

belong “wholly to the world.”³⁵⁷ Paul encourages the church in Galatia to continue to “work for the good of all” (6:10). Yes, the real world of the new creation is witnessed in the church-community as the present body of Christ, but this body does not exist for itself, it is for the world. Paul uses his freedom in Christ to “become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). The form of Christ is one that positions the church towards the world. The church does not impose “the teaching of Christ or so-called Christian principles... directly to the world in order to form the world according to them.”³⁵⁸ This is not how formation works. This would be imposing a law upon the world. The church witnesses to the reality of Jesus Christ revealed by being conformed into the form of Christ for the world and in a way that calls the world to become what it already is in Christ.

The Vision of Free Life in the Real World

The presence of Christ in the Spirit is not just a comforting idea, it is an active presence. The Spirit is acting within the church-community, forming the community into the body of Christ in a way that evokes action. When faced with the concrete other in the circumstance at hand, the presence of Christ in the Spirit acts in the human being. Morse says it this way, “what facing reality calls *for* the reality facing us calls *forth*.”³⁵⁹ Christ is present in a way that doesn’t leave a person guessing at options but evokes action in obedience to the will of God, which is, the form of Jesus Christ made real in us. Here we clearly see where Bonhoeffer goes beyond Luther. Both talk of the formation of the Christian into the crucified Christ. However, for Luther the Christian is liberated from sin and able to live in *response* to the grace of Christ. For Bonhoeffer, the Christian is liberated into a concrete daily freedom of life.

³⁵⁷ Kessler, “Bonhoeffer on Law-Breaking,” in *Ontology and Ethics*, 114.

³⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 93. See also 18.

³⁵⁹ Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes*, 94.

The law, universal principles, or moral ethics, these do not direct daily life as such. We cannot come to God through these things. We come to these things via God, that being, via the crucified Christ in whom we are free to live. For Bonhoeffer, the Christian is liberated *in to* freedom. In Paul's words, "for freedom Christ has set us free" (5:1).

Now we must remember that Bonhoeffer's venture of freedom requires the individual to discern the situation, to hear the Word, and to partake of the sacraments. Real action flows from embracing the life of the church-community that believes itself to be the real world in Christ. We are not proposing a mindless hope that God might show up, but living in the confidence that He is present and active as we live within the world responsibly. This is not a call to live on "autopilot" hoping someone else is in control, or autonomously thinking it is all our doing.³⁶⁰ Rather it is a "synergistic doing" expressed in Paul's words, "I worked... though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor 15:10).³⁶¹ Bonhoeffer states it this way: "Free action... recognises itself ultimately as being God's action."³⁶² For Bonhoeffer, "God appears on the scene as an acting subject" in the responsible and free action of the human being in Christ.³⁶³ The Christian acts in vicarious responsible freedom for the other as the form of Christ becomes real within them. They responsibly act "in doing what is right," working "for the good of all, especially those of the family of faith" (6:9-10). In the concrete situation the form of Christ directs action that is for the other. In Paul's epistle to the Philippians he encourages them to do "nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4). It is in the freedom won by the gospel, and the reality of the crucified Christ

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 226.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 226.

taking form in us, that “we must risk making concrete judgements and decisions”³⁶⁴ because we are now free for God and for the other.

It is the responsible *freedom* of the Christian who exists in Christ, that being, in the church-community, that allows the Christian to act in accord with the form of Christ. It is the brave venture of free action that the Spirit is forming within us that aligns to the revealed will of God in Christ. It will align itself with the cruciform Christ who is *for* the other and the world, and be responsible before God. This vision is not something that is coming, but something that already is. The new creation is the real world and the church-community is called to be what it already is.³⁶⁵ Paul calls the church to live within the real world of the new creation where daily life rests upon the free Word of God, Jesus Christ. The Christian lives in *real* freedom within the new creation, trusting in the gracious act of God that allows them to be human before, and with, their Creator. Freedom is the air we breathe in the new creation; it is the peace of already belonging; it is the wonder of gracious forgiveness; it is the permission to be human and enjoy life; it is the invitation to make real decisions trusting that Christ is present in the decision by the Spirit.

The burden of this thesis has been to show that Bonhoeffer offers a concrete vision for daily Christian life that rests upon a robust reading of Galatians. Was Paul offering the church a vision for life that was much more radically free than she was prepared to live? Martyn suggests that Paul lost the argument with the majority of the Galatian church members,³⁶⁶ and that the “safety” of moral law and principles won out. The human tendency to want God in our debt overcame the radical call of faith. This radical invitation of the gospel was something that made Paul leave

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁶⁵ Martyn, *Galatians*, 535. See also Holmes, “The Spirit and the Promise,” 227.

³⁶⁶ Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” 246-247.

everything behind and live solely in the freedom secured by the cross. The Christian is invited into the venture of a free life where God's law is fulfilled in them because they are in Christ and are being conformed into the form of the crucified Christ. Accordingly, the Christian takes seriously the *other* towards whom they are acting in a way that shapes the action *for* them. When Paul says, "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22), he is not watering down the gospel so as to attract converts, but taking on the form of Christ who is *for* the other. Christ was willing to lay down everything and so was Paul. It is this radical venture of responsible freedom that can only be found in the freedom offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ. I hope to have shown that Bonhoeffer captures the heart of Paul's theology of freedom, built as it is upon Luther's account of grace. It presents, I think, a compelling and biblical vision for concrete daily life in responsible freedom.

Chapter 6. The Freedom of the Christian Today

We have seen how Bonhoeffer provides a concrete reading of Paul's ethical vision for the church in the epistle to the Galatians. In this chapter we will constructively build upon this vision and Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom as it attends to the concrete today. As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, the today of this essay is the evangelical church.³⁶⁷ In other words, our focus in this chapter is "what do Paul and Bonhoeffer have to say to the evangelical church today in regard to freedom?" We will also be building upon our previous chapter's insights that were influenced by Martyn's influential work on Paul as an apocalyptic theologian.³⁶⁸ It is clear that Martyn draws from Bonhoeffer's theology of reality and freedom. This will help inform us as we move forward.

The evangelical church is complex and diverse.³⁶⁹ Therefore, I do not wish to offer a critique of the evangelical church; rather, I hope to provide a constructive sketch of an evangelical ecclesiology based upon our study of freedom thus far. Bonhoeffer has become a respected "conversation partner" for evangelicals.³⁷⁰ Our conversation here concerns the responsible freedom that the present Christ is forming in his church-community as it becomes real. Indeed, the church-community is not called to fight against the world but to be radically *for* the world. What does this mean for the evangelical church today? How do we be *for* a pluralistic world without losing our Christological centrality? How would taking seriously our reading of Galatians in

³⁶⁷ McBride gives an overview of the US evangelical church, see Jennifer M. McBride, *The Church for the World: A theology of Public Witness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). p. 23-54. For an in-depth study of evangelical Christianity in America see Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

³⁶⁸ In fact, when reading Martyn's Galatians commentary, one cannot help but see Bonhoeffer's theological influence.

³⁶⁹ Smith, *Christian America*, 22 & 60.

³⁷⁰ Johnson and Larsen, "Introduction," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 13. Johnson and Larsen see this collection of essays as predominantly a "serious evangelical theological engagement with the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer."

light of Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom influence the daily life of the church-community? Strikingly, Christian Smith, in his survey of evangelicals in the United States of America, claims that "many non-evangelicals view evangelical Christians... as enemies of freedom."³⁷¹ Specifically, therefore, how can the church witness to the real freedom of humanity in a world that pursues and celebrates an autonomous and individualistic idea of freedom? And can this witness be communicated with a "new terminology" that Bonhoeffer believed was needed? To do this we will explore five aspects of how the church is called to live daily in light of our study: humbly, publicly, in service, communally, and in obedience.

Christian Freedom as Humble Life

The crucified form of Christ being formed within the church-community can be witnessed concretely in an attitude of humility *before* the world. Paul determines to never boast in anything except the cross on which he himself has been crucified (Gal 6:14). This means he has died to himself, which includes any claim to superiority or special favour. Paul's aim in Galatians is not to prove himself as greater than the Jerusalem teachers.³⁷² His "boast" is not in himself but in the cross of Christ on which he was also crucified. Living in the cruciform presence of Christ does not lead to a superiority complex. The outpouring of grace that Paul received did not offer him an elevated position in regard to others and the world. In fact, grace called him to the opposite. In his epistle to the church in Philippi, he encourages them to "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves" and to look "to the interests of others." This is the form of Christ who took "the form of a slave... humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross" (Phil 2:4-8). It is in this daily pattern of dying in

³⁷¹ Smith, *Christian America*, 4.

³⁷² Martyn, *Galatians*, 560, 563-564.

obedience to the present person of Christ that the church-community lives in real freedom.³⁷³ Christ gained victory in the world in his free and obedient humiliation. Bonhoeffer says it like this: “God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us.”³⁷⁴ He goes on to say that, paradoxically, in this way Christ actually “gains ground and power in the world by being powerless.”³⁷⁵ The church-community, therefore, must live daily alongside the world and the neighbour as weak and powerless, and in this way she allows Christ to gain ground.

Jennifer McBride, building upon Bonhoeffer’s thinking, states that “through confession and repentance, the church communicates not that it is specially favoured but that it humbly recognises Christ alone as ultimate truth.”³⁷⁶ We are called to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2), to come alongside our fellow believers, and the world, in the act of repentance and acceptance of guilt. Christ’s way is the acceptance of guilt in the responsible freedom witnessed in His being *for* humanity and *before* the Father. The church is *for* the world by taking on the guilt of the world vicariously and having an attitude of repentance and confession. McBride affirms that “acceptance of guilt is the only exclusive claim about itself that the church has over the world.”³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Joel Lawrence calls this communal reality “death together” which he describes in his essay “Death Together: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Becoming the Church for Others,” in *Christ and Culture*, 122.

³⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 479-480.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ McBride, *The Church for the World*, 29.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

A misunderstanding of the purpose of election can produce a misplaced self-confidence and arrogant posture.³⁷⁸ We see an example of this in the New Testament's portrayal of some of the religious leaders. They were able to say who was "in" and "out" because of their understanding of the law and personal pious life. This attitude marked Paul's former life as a Pharisee, reaching a tragic climax in his approval of Stephen's killing and the persecution of Jesus' followers (Acts 7:54-8:3). This religious posture was fully rejected by Paul once the gracious act of God in Christ was revealed to him. Paul's claim to be the foremost of all sinners (1 Tim 1:15) is an attitude that should be witnessed in all who receive grace. Bonhoeffer takes on the same posture, saying, "Human beings die daily the death of sinners... they cannot lift themselves above other people or establish themselves as models because they recognise themselves as the greatest of all sinners."³⁷⁹ For Bonhoeffer, election is living in the Yes and the No spoken over our lives in the cross. The No is understanding we are fallen human beings and the Yes is living in the responsible freedom of the new humanity *for* the other and the world.

We do not wish to negate the absolute wonder and privilege it is to be part of the new creation in Christ. We must remember, however, that our new humanity in Christ is not to be a "triumph over the wreckage of a defeated humanity."³⁸⁰ Christ came to share in our humanity (Heb 2:17-18), to be tempted (Luke 4:1-12), and to reclaim humanity for God in obedience (John 6:38). His life was not intended to present the ultimate ethical human being, but to reclaim humanity for God, as a real human being, in the freedom of obedience before God.³⁸¹ Christ allows human

³⁷⁸ I do not intend to try and present a comprehensive delineation of Bonhoeffer's theology of election. However, we can note that election for Bonhoeffer has everything to do with Christ's act for us and in us, and cannot be used by the elect as some kind of pious attitude towards others. For more on election see Matthew Puffer, "Election in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*: Discerning a Late Revision," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14.3 (July 2012): 255-276.

³⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 95.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

beings the freedom to be truly human. We understand that we are creatures and weak, but that in our weakness Christ is made strong (2 Cor 12:9-10). The world will often associate freedom with power. For the church-community, we display to the world that real freedom is found in the acceptance of our weakness before God and alongside each other. True freedom is *in* the act of repentance, confession, and sharing in our individual and communal guilt. We are no longer striving to “please” God, or obtain our own “godliness,” but are free to be God’s creatures in the knowledge that he knows us, loves us, and is *for* us in Christ’s contemporaneous presence.

Irrespective of whether the common opinion of evangelicals is true, many non-Christians view evangelicals as judgmental, exclusivist, and holier-than-thou. We need to ask why this is the case? Is it our evangelistic strategy? Our public stand on issues of morality that attempts to bring God’s kingdom to earth? Is it our use of scripture to try and make people see and understand themselves as sinners? It is common knowledge that the majority of what we communicate between human persons is understood through body language and tone of voice. Therefore, how evangelicals view themselves will effect how the gospel is communicated. A constructive place to start when building upon Bonhoeffer’s call for “an expanded terminology”³⁸² is to ensure the church-community continues to live in the humility rendered by the crucified and humble form of Christ that is becoming real amongst us.

We have seen that for Bonhoeffer the word of God that comes to the church through scripture, the sermon, and the sacrament, is not for the condemning of the world but works towards the formation of the community into the form of Christ. This

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 257.

provides the center and limit for daily life in a way that helps the Christian discern free, responsible, and concrete action in relation to their neighbour. If, as the evangelical church, we are preoccupied with upholding the ethical and moral standards of the world, we will inadvertently find ourselves in opposition to the world. Yes, we must resist sin, but we cannot save the world from sin, and we are not called to convict the world of its sin. This is solely the work of God in Christ and the Spirit (cf. 1 John 2:2, John 16:8). We have seen clearly that Bonhoeffer sees the church-community as ethically concerned solely with Christ becoming more real today through the work of the Spirit. This is seen, not as we judge the world, but as we love the world and the concrete neighbour in the humble form of Christ. "Paul," Martyn explains, "calls the Galatians steadily to be what they already are."³⁸³ And what they already are is the new creation found in the cruciform presence of Christ being for the world becoming real in the power of the Spirit. Our reading of Galatians in light of Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom calls the church-community to stand in humility and weakness within the world.

Christian Freedom as Public Life

Bonhoeffer calls the church-community into a life that cannot be privatised because the world is the "domain of concrete responsibility."³⁸⁴ In fact, he claims that the privatisation of Christian life is the result of pursuing a principle-based ethic.³⁸⁵ Here the individual retreats into the private arena where they can fulfil ethical requirements without the influence of the world. The Christian easily falls back into religion. This type of life is lived in the realm of the ideal as opposed to the concrete,

³⁸³ Martyn, *Galatians*, 535.

³⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 267.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 248. See also *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 455; Bonhoeffer speaks of the private and personal sphere of God being increased because God is being increasingly pushed out of the world.

and therefore, is unable to be lived in the freedom of responsibility. "What this amounts to," says Bonhoeffer, "is individuals pulling back from the living responsibility of their historical existence into a private realisation of ethical ideals by which they see their own personal goodness guaranteed."³⁸⁶ This is also at odds with Paul's ethical vision for the church because the ethical ideal sets itself up as a new law under which the Christian is enslaved. The freedom of the Christian and the church-community is not found in the private sphere but concretely and publicly in the midst of the world.

The other direction principle-based ethics can lead is towards religious enthusiasm.³⁸⁷ Here the Christian attempts to enforce their understanding of good and evil upon the world. The church sees herself as the moral guide for the lost world. After spending time studying in the United States, Bonhoeffer's assessment of the church in America was that it had become preoccupied with morality and being the truth bearers of what is right and wrong.³⁸⁸ Even if not intentionally, this communicates an underlying belief that the church is specially favoured and has obtained the knowledge of good and evil that it now proclaims to the world, or worse still, tries to enforce upon the world. This mistaken relation to the world would entail taking the biblical law, and our interpretation of it, and using it against the world. This ultimately amounts to taking the law from the hands of Christ and returning it to an anthropocentric tool. By placing the world under a law, we in fact return ourselves to the yoke of slavery and lose the freedom rendered in Christ. As soon as we condemn the world with our supposed handle on truth we instantaneously condemn ourselves. When we separate ethics from the present

³⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 220.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

³⁸⁸ See McBride, *The Church for the World*, 37.

person of Christ, who is the Truth (John 14:6), a new law is created that opposes the work of grace.

In both these cases, salvation is understood as rooted in the ethical standards and truth claims of the church. Here the church claims authority over the world, which as we have already discussed, is not congruent with the humiliated form of Christ. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, claims that Christ has not charged the church-community with “the responsibility of turning the world into the kingdom of God, but only of taking the next necessary step that corresponds to God’s becoming human in Christ.”³⁸⁹ For Bonhoeffer, the church is not called to take on the mandate of the state.³⁹⁰ How then does the church engage with the world publicly? For starters, as we have seen, the church engages the world humbly and in weakness. It means the church does not assume it has all the solutions to the problems of the world.³⁹¹ The church does, however, have something to say and that something is directly related to God’s word for the world.³⁹² So what does a public witness to Jesus Christ look like?

For one, the church should not allow her eternal salvation to be reduced to an other-worldly salvation. This easily translates into disregard for, or even hatred of, the world. In a letter to his friend Eberhard Bethge from prison, Bonhoeffer suggests that the church’s focus on the other-worldly salvation of the individual is unbiblical.³⁹³ “What matters,” he suggests, “is not the beyond but this world, how it is created and preserved, is given laws, reconciled, and renewed. What is beyond this world is meant, in the gospel, to be there *for* this world.”³⁹⁴ If the freedom of the Christian and

³⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 225.

³⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 362-363.

³⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 352-356.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 355-356.

³⁹³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 372-373.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 373.

the church-community is *for* the world then the Christian needs to be a visible part of the life of the world. The church needs to care for creation. It must be concerned with politics and policy. It must be attentive to culture. It must be for the family, and care for the hopeless, hurting and hungry. However, it approaches and speaks into all these areas from the posture of the crucified Christ. We must engage the world first and foremost from the position of powerlessness, not with our cleverly argued solutions, but with concrete and real love for real and concrete people in real life situations and circumstances. The church in fulfilment of its mandate has a role to play in relation to the other mandates that Christ has established to order the world. And for Bonhoeffer, the mandate of the church witnesses to the reconciled reality of the world and God in the person of Christ. The underlying question here concerns the purpose of the church? It is not, in Bonhoeffer's assessment, called to enforce so-called Christian law on the world.

For Bonhoeffer, the world is not lost but reconciled in Christ. The church-community is called to live out of the understanding that God has reconciled all things unto himself in Christ (Col 1:20). "Whoever perceives the body of Jesus Christ in faith can no longer speak of the world as if it were lost, as if it were separated from God; they can no longer separate themselves in clerical pride from the world. The world belongs to Christ."³⁹⁵ Yes, the world is still under sin and knows not about its reconciliation. There is a profound No spoken over the world in the cross of Christ where sin and enmity with God were destroyed. "The No proclaimed upon the world is not untruthful or inaccurate," explains McBride, "rather it is misleading as an isolated proclamation. Any reading of reality that does not position Christ's No within Christ's all-encompassing Yes leads to an overly positive evaluation of the church and overly negative estimation of this-worldly life."³⁹⁶ Too often the church

³⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 67.

³⁹⁶ McBride, *The Church for the World*, 94.

places the No over the world while positioning themselves under Christ's Yes. However, all creation lives under the Yes and No of Christ. This does not mean we live unconscious of sin and evil that is still present in the world. No, we flee from it. As Bonhoeffer explains, "there is a love for the world that is enmity toward God."³⁹⁷ Yet, as we die to the desires of the Flesh (Gal 16-17) "and the sin that clings so closely," (Heb 12:1) we are raised alive again in Christ with the posture of being *for* the world that is reconciled in Christ.

The public call for the church-community is to come alongside the world in solidarity in the form of Christ who is *for* the world. As soon as the church-community begins to look in on itself and fight for its protection, it begins to lose the freedom found in living *for*. The church proclaims the freedom of humanity by taking responsibility for the world and each other. The church lives, as individuals and corporately, in a manner that witnesses to the freedom found in living vicariously. The church exists for the world and is the space where ultimate reality is witnessed within the world. The church "allows the reality of Jesus Christ to become real in proclamation, church order, and Christian life."³⁹⁸ This proclamation and life is one grounded in the humility and *for-ness* of the form of Christ becoming real amongst His people.

What we are saying here is not that the church must blindly accept the world where the works of the Flesh are rampant. The Christian will be "different" in the sense that their life is producing the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). These will stand in stark contrast to the works of the Flesh. It will take courage to stand fast in the world, and there will likely be persecution. We do not however engage in a battle for space; rather, we love all the more as the form of Christ becomes increasingly greater

³⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 66.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

amongst us. Unfortunately, many times the perception of the evangelical church is one that resembles more closely Paul's description of the works of the Flesh.³⁹⁹ In contrast, the church-community is called to be defined by the fruits of the Spirit. The well-known example of the apostate Roman Emperor Julian serves the point here. He encourages the priest Arsacius to emulate the Christians who were showing kindness and hospitality to strangers, displaying a devout lifestyle, and caring for the poor, inside *and outside* of the church (cf. Gal 6:10).⁴⁰⁰

In saying this, Bonhoeffer does not shy away from the call to proclamation. The gospel is to be spoken publicly and personally. The mandate of the church is for and against the state in that it is called to be a voice that reminds the government of its mandate to retain law and order.⁴⁰¹ At a more individual level, the evangelical church is known for her focus on personal evangelism.⁴⁰² However, the classic gospel message, claims T. F. Torrance, can actually be rather un-evangelical. Myk Habets, discussing Torrance's claim, summarises, "the Gospel is preached in this unevangelical way when it is announced that Christ died and rose again for sinners if they would accept this for themselves. Torrance considers this a repetition of the subtle legalist twist to the Gospel which worried St Paul so much in the Epistle to the Galatians."⁴⁰³ We see here the gospel resting upon the autonomous individual and

³⁹⁹ In a sarcastic but revealing comment about popular perception in America, Smith states, "who is going to speak well of evangelicals? It's like standing up for the Crusades." See Smith, *Christian America*, 195.

⁴⁰⁰ Oliver Nicholson, "The 'Pagan Churches' of Maximinus Daia and Julian the Apostate," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45.1 (January 1994): 1-2. Italics added.

⁴⁰¹ Bonhoeffer provides an outworking of his mandate theology in the essay "The Church and the Jewish Question." See Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12, 361-370. In this essay we see the tension of the church's and state's calling to live out their mandates as being "with-one-another, for-one-another, and over-against-one-another." Bonhoeffer discusses the mandates in depth in *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 388-408. See also Bonhoeffer's comments on the church and state while commenting on the church in America in the essay "Protestantism without Reformation," in Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground: 1937-1940*, DBWE 15, 450- 456.

⁴⁰² McBride provides an insightful assessment of "witness" regarded as personal evangelism; see McBride, *The Church for the World*, 29 ff.

⁴⁰³ Myk Habets, "The Doctrine of Election in Evangelical Calvinism: T.F. Torrance as a Case Study," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73 (2008): 351.

their personal freedom to choose. Torrance suggests a more evangelical way to share the gospel should sound more like this:

God loves you so utterly and completely that he has given himself for you in Jesus Christ his beloved Son, and has thereby pledged his very being as God for your salvation. In Jesus Christ God has actualised his unconditional love for you in your human nature in such a once for all way, that he cannot go back upon it without undoing the Incarnation and the Cross and thereby denying himself. Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him, and has thereby already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. He has bound you to himself by his love in a way that he will never let you go, for even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell his love will never cease. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.⁴⁰⁴

What we see here is a proclamation of the gospel that captures the gracious Christ event *for* the individual and the world. The apocalyptic coming of Christ radically changed the world by reconciling all things to himself. This proclamation uses a language that resonates with Bonhoeffer and Paul. However, does it go far enough? Bonhoeffer envisioned a language that does not depend upon the language of Christendom with its diminishing authority.⁴⁰⁵ In this sense, we need a new language that communicates the freedom of the gospel to a world that largely does not want to hear it. To that question we now turn.

Christian Freedom as Serving Life

In a practical and concrete manner, the church-community can be *for* the world and the neighbour through the act of serving. Bonhoeffer calls the church-community to be “known to the world by word and life.”⁴⁰⁶ The Christian life should be one of service for others in the manner that Christ came to serve the world (Mark 10:45). As

⁴⁰⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 94. Quoted by Habets, “The Doctrine of Election in Evangelical Calvinism,” 351-352.

⁴⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 362-363 & 389-390.

⁴⁰⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 67.

we saw in Galatians, Paul can call the church to a lifestyle of service so radical it is congruent with slavery to others (Gal 5:13). The church-community lives in vicarious representative action for others and the world by doing free acts of love *for* the other and the world. In fact, our freedom as human beings before God is witnessed and experienced in such acts. Freedom is not an attribute obtained or held by the human person, but the experience of participation in Christ as being *for* others and the world. McBride suggests that “The church participates in the goodness of the triune God by following the form of Jesus Christ, the form of a servant.”⁴⁰⁷

Bonhoeffer writes, “The primary confession of the Christian before the world is the deed which interprets itself. If this deed is to have become a force, then the world itself will long to confess the Word.”⁴⁰⁸ Our proclamation *for* the world and the neighbour is seen in our action *for* the world and the neighbour. Here we see that our deeds can themselves be a form of communication to the world. The church-community is called to concretely be the real love of God for the world, otherwise the church fails to be a true church and any proclamation falls on deaf ears (cf. 1 Cor 13). Here our proclamation becomes one of action as opposed to words.⁴⁰⁹ Here the evangelical invitation is not to mentally assent to Christian truth, rather, to participate and experience the One who is the Truth.

Paul uses the experience of the Spirit at work among the Galatian church in his argument against works (Gal 3:2-5). The evangelical church can be wary of “experience” having theological impetus. And yes, experience is subjective. However, Christ is present in the Spirit in such a way that the church-community participates in his contemporaneous reality. Freedom is not an idea; it is reality

⁴⁰⁷ McBride, *The Church for the World*, 137.

⁴⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer, “The Nature of the Church,” in *A Testament to Freedom*, 86.

⁴⁰⁹ See McBride who makes this point, McBride, *The Church for the World*, 51-52.

experienced in Christ. Luther was driven by his experience with the word of God revealing the liberating gospel to him. Paul was transformed by the experience of witnessing Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-8). The early church took into account the experience of the Spirit at work among the Gentiles when making the radical theological decision regarding circumcision in Acts 15.⁴¹⁰ In the concrete experience of getting our hands dirty in the service of others, human beings participate in the reality of Jesus Christ present, whether they know it or not. And in this action, that aligns with ultimate reality, they experience the freedom of being truly human in and for the world and the other. As we invite others to “be for” their neighbour, in the action of serving others, they are able to experience the person of Christ concretely, and they enter into the real world.

I am not suggesting we use “being for others” as a new law, or method, that provides a way for people to come to God. Human beings are not saved by doing acts of service. What we are doing here is preparing the way for Christ to come.⁴¹¹ Even though it is Christ who comes to us, and only Christ who can elicit faith in human beings, we are not excluded from tasks that prepare the way for Christ.⁴¹² This is part of the responsible life that, for example, gives food to the hungry, provides shelter to the homeless, and supplies the lonely with community.⁴¹³ Bonhoeffer claims that in this way we are “preparing the way for the coming of

⁴¹⁰ With the rise of postmodernism, there has been much discussion surrounding the loci of truth. No longer is truth able to be seen as absolutely objective. Bonhoeffer provides a way forward by placing the loci of truth in the present person of Christ. Truth is absolute in Christ but concrete and known in his contemporaneous nature. For more on this issue see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.1 (March 2005): 91; Douglas Groothuis, “Why Truth Matters Most: An Apologetic for Truth-Seeking in Postmodern Times,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47.3 (September 2004): 441-454; R. Albert Mohler, “What is Truth? Truth and Contemporary Culture,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.1 (March 2005): 63-75.

⁴¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 167.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

grace.”⁴¹⁴ The action of the church in serving the world is something penultimate and yet related to the ultimate because it flows from the being of Christ present in the community, that is, from Christ’s faith and grace becoming real in the world. For it is the Spirit that forms the church-community in a way that produces the action of God in humanity in real and concrete ways and circumstances.

All human persons can participate in this type of real action, for all humanity has been reconciled in the ultimate reality of Jesus Christ revealed. In this way people can “become human again” in preparation for the coming of Christ.⁴¹⁵ In other words, Christ creates this type of serving activity for others within His body because Christ wants to come to all people. For Christ’s action is his being, and his being is his action. As the church-community’s formative action, which is Christ’s action anyway, becomes concretely real, then Christ is *there* in his being. In the free responsible action of loving the neighbour, God is present.⁴¹⁶ We cannot and should not separate our Christian daily lives from the contemporaneous Christ. In all things, we are *in* Christ as his body present in the world. To separate belief and action is to dissect our true humanity. Faith is not solely the mental assent to correct belief, but the living experience of grace becoming real within human beings. Faith is action that is formed by the Spirit revealing the reconciliation of all things in Christ in the daily life of the church-community. In this way, our freedom is expressed not just in being *for* others, but as real freedom is witnessed and experienced by all those willing to serve.

We see here a concrete “new language” that flows from the formation of the church-community into the form of Christ. The proclamation of the church is one of

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 226. See also Puffer, “Election in Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*,” 265.

participatory witness to the ultimate reality of the world. The Spirit evokes action that is in accord with the form of Christ becoming real that delivers true freedom. Here autonomous freedom is silenced by the experience of real freedom, and therefore real life.

Christian Freedom as Communal life

We are confident that when Christ calls someone he calls them to community. Bonhoeffer, following Paul, makes this clear. Human "being" only exists in relationships, and is truly witnessed in the body of Christ present in the world as His church. It is here that we first learn to live in responsible freedom for each other and before God. It is in our life together that the Spirit is able to form us into the form of Christ. Bonhoeffer does not want us thinking that formation occurs as some mystical pixie dust is sprinkled over the church. Formation is concretely found in the daily life of our relationships, and primarily in the relations of the church-community. Here the bonds of life between the individual, God, and the neighbour are made concrete. These bonds are essential to true freedom. And so, for Bonhoeffer, the Christian is called "to live in a congregation" so as to be able to "understand how 'Christ is formed' in it."⁴¹⁷ The truth is that this kind of life is not effortless. Christ calls the church to die daily because the Flesh is constantly at war with the Spirit in us. It is painful to have our "rough edges" knocked off (Prov 27:17). It is not easy to "become slaves to one another" (Gal 5:13). But freedom is found in exactly this place.

For Bonhoeffer, the life of the church-community was one that was embedded in the scriptures, humble in confession, and unified in communion. Our Christian life within the community helps shape our free and responsible decisions in relation to

⁴¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 475.

our neighbour, and forms us increasingly, by the Spirit, into the form of Christ. If you want to hear God's word, explains Bonhoeffer, then go to church!⁴¹⁸ We do not just hear the preacher, but hear the word of God through the preacher. The importance of the communal aspect of these practices cannot be over emphasised. For example, for Bonhoeffer, the suppression of confession means the church would "cease to be the church of Christ."⁴¹⁹ The individual, and the community, is called to confess because here we allow ourselves to be formed into the form of Christ who became guilty for us. Real freedom is not found in a pious life void of confession. Rather, freedom is found in the realisation that we are guilty sinners living by grace.

For all his emphasis on community, Bonhoeffer does not dissolve the individual into the community. The individual still exists as a human person responsible before God. Nevertheless, their freedom, and true humanity, is only found in the concreteness of community where the essential bonds of life are found. The Western idea of freedom has made life itself the end goal. Autonomous freedom removes the individual from others and therefore from life itself. "Life that makes itself absolute," remarks Bonhoeffer, "destroys itself."⁴²⁰ Life that is separate from the form given by God in "service of other lives and of the world"⁴²¹ will never be free or find its meaning. It will self-destruct. Life is a gift given to humanity and is found in the person of Christ who embraced the entire world and the whole of life. The freedom of the Christian found in Bonhoeffer's reading of Paul is essential for the world that is being destroyed by sin. The works of the Flesh run rampant within Western culture's ideal of autonomous freedom. This ideal of freedom destroys our humanity as we make choices that serve ourselves in isolation from others and the reality of

⁴¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 166.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

Christ's presence. The evangelical church must resist the influence of the autonomous freedom celebrated by the world.

This communal aspect of Christian life is not just in the local congregation. Bonhoeffer was well known for his ecumenical work.⁴²² He saw the church-community as being, not just the congregation, but the body of Christ universally.⁴²³ In his appraisal of the American church he was intrigued at how divided and splintered the church was.⁴²⁴ This is a very true assessment of the evangelical movement. To define it is virtually impossible because there is very little holding the separate congregations together. Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom challenges this state of being and encourages the evangelical church to be for each other. The congregation exists not just for its own members but must exist for the congregation down the road. Church growth pressures often pit congregations against each other. How do evangelical congregations be *for* other congregations (evangelical and non-evangelical) in our towns, cities, and countries. The ecumenical spirit is not just an ecclesiological ideal but a concrete reality of rectification and repentance expressed in the form of Christ. As church-communities we are *for* each other in a way that is essential to our freedom as human beings before God. To neglect this aspect of the Christian life is to stunt the form of Christ becoming real among his people.

The evangelical church is also called to be *for* the universal church. How can Bonhoeffer's insights find concrete expression in the universal church? How can, for example, the evangelical church be *for* our Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic

⁴²² For example, see John A. Moses, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Prioritization of Church Unity (Oekumene)," *The Journal of Religious History* 24.2 (June 2000): 196-212. Also Konrad Raiser, "Bonhoeffer and the Ecumenical Movement," in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition*, ed. John W. de Grunchy, 319-339 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁴²³ See Bonhoeffer's essay on "Protestantism without Reformation," in Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground: 1937-1940*, DBWE 15, 442.

⁴²⁴ See *ibid.*

bothers and sisters? Konrad Raiser explains that Bonhoeffer's view of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, within which he served was that it, "was not an instrumental organisation with specific tasks, but a manifestation of the church itself."⁴²⁵ As the form of Christ becomes real within the church-community the ecumenical spirit should increase. We need to understand that we do not live in opposition to each other, rather, we are called to be radically *for* each other. We should not let doctrine reign over the form of Christ becoming real amongst us. Being truly one church in Christ should place "the grace of God above the doctrine of the church."⁴²⁶

Not that this is a call for unity at all costs. Bonhoeffer was clear that the German Church had fallen outside of the bounds of Christ's church because it no longer held Christ as center. Raiser explains, "Unity is no end in itself; it is sustainable only if rooted in the truth. But the reverse must also be affirmed: no truth claim can be validated apart from the community."⁴²⁷ Bonhoeffer provides a concrete ecumenical foundation that is radically Christological to the core, where the revealed ultimate reality of Christ *for* the world is key. The gospel is that God is for us all. The foundation is Christ alone and his form becoming real in the concrete world through his people. When the different denominational churches live *for* each other, then the world may take more notice (John 13:35). The church lives in the new creation where truth is Christ becoming real in the world by the Spirit. Here we find the freedom to be *for* one-another. We don't need to agree, but we do need to love each other humbly, publicly, and in service. Only in this concrete form of Christ do we experience real freedom, and therefore, experience the reality of Truth himself.

⁴²⁵ Konrad Raiser, "Bonhoeffer and the Ecumenical Movement," in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition*, 331.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 332.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.

Christian Freedom as Obedient Life

It is important to think about the fact that the freedom rendered in Christ remains Christ's freedom. By this I mean that the human being is not free in the sense of autonomy, but free in relation with God in Christ, and in relation to the neighbour. If Bonhoeffer is correct, and I believe he is, then the autonomous freedom celebrated and pursued in the Western world, and therefore influencing the evangelical church to differing degrees, is a freedom related to the Flesh that will eventually destroy community and human life itself. Real freedom is found in the obedient life of Christ being made real amongst his people through the formative work of the Spirit. Obedience and freedom are not at odds with each other. Rather, they work together in the life God has gifted to human beings that must live before him and in answer to him. This is the ground of a free life that shows itself in responsible action *for* others and the world.

When Paul communicates his vision for life in the freedom of the gospel he tells the Galatian congregations that the "works of the flesh are obvious" (Gal 5:19). Bonhoeffer's account of responsible freedom agrees with such a vision. The majority of the time Christians know the correct course of action because they are embedded in the life of the church, are hearing the word of God, and have the Spirit of God forming and leading them. Paul encourages the church to "obey the truth" and "be guided by the Spirit" (Gal 5:7, 25). When the Christian questions the clear and obvious action set before them in the concrete encounter of the other they are not living in responsibility. Paul and Bonhoeffer are not proposing a life that is free from obedience to God's vision of life. They are not antinomian in the sense of encouraging licentiousness; rather, it is a life lived in response to the call of Christ to find life and freedom *in* the very action of obedience. The freedom of Christ, explains

Bonhoeffer, “consists precisely in the complete simplicity of his action.”⁴²⁸ It is simple because it corresponds to the will of God which we know is Jesus Christ becoming real in the world.

Paul is not idealist in the sense that this is something easy to do. There is a call to “stand firm” (Gal 5:1), to resist the “desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16), and to “not grow weary in doing what is right” (Gal 6:9). There is a “rule” (Gal 6:16) that must be followed, and that is obedience to the form of Christ becoming real amongst the church-community. This “rule” is a life that is being crucified with Christ, which means being formed into the present person of Christ. This is a life that fits within the new creation that God has established in the cosmic Christ event. The obedient life is lived with our eyes fixed on Christ and the new creation, not looking back to the self-confidence that came from the religious use of law, but moving forward in the freedom granted by God’s acceptance and forgiveness in Christ.

For Bonhoeffer, the new creation becomes concrete in the ethical moment of address by the other. In our relation to our neighbour we are faced with the ethical and real decision. When the human being acts in accord with the Spirit and the form of Christ in responsible action *for* the other, freedom is expressed. Paul and Bonhoeffer both understand the radical freedom rendered in the gospel of Jesus Christ and they encourage the church-community to “stand firm” in the bold venture of living freely for the neighbour and the world. For it is “for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1).

⁴²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 313.

Conclusion: The Freedom of the Church-Community

My goal has been to show that Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom offers a concrete Christian ethic for the evangelical church today that aligns with Paul's vision for the church set free in the apocalyptic gospel of Christ. For Bonhoeffer, ultimate reality is revealed in the person of Christ who is vicariously *for* the world. This reality invaded the cosmos and initiated the new creation in Christ. The real world is now that which is witnessed in Christ, who is present as the church-community. Bonhoeffer provides a Christocentric epistemology that reshapes the way human beings see and experience the world. He also offers a Christology that is not occupied by ideas but is witnessed concretely in *who* Christ is *for* the world and *before* the Father. The church-community is the space where the world witnesses this new reality, the new creation, as Christ's contemporaneous presence becomes real through the Spirit.

True human freedom is rooted in the freedom of God being *for* his creation, witnessed ultimately in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ vicariously for the world. Bonhoeffer allows the Christian to approach life with an entirely new vision founded upon the reality of *who* Christ is becoming real in the concrete relationships and circumstances of the present. This reality is the location of true life in Christ. The new creation renders itself concrete in, and as, the form of Christ becomes real within the world by the Spirit. For Bonhoeffer, this freedom exists in tandem with responsibility, and within the concrete relationships between God and the other. As the Christian lives within the church-community, which is the present body of Christ, they are conformed by the Spirit into the form of Christ in a way that allows responsible and free action in the world. Freedom is not the presence of possibility or a motivating factor in ethical action. Real freedom is found in activity evoked by the Spirit in the form of Christ revealed.

Bonhoeffer's theology of "freedom for" is not based in either moralism or ethical ideals, but rather the form of Christ *for* the concrete other and the world. That means the circumstance at hand is brought before Christ and the Christian is free to act in accord with what the Spirit is doing within them *for* the other in concrete decision. This action is free because it does not earn or add to our salvation. The Christian is free from needing to live under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In contrast, they live in obedience to the command of God who is Jesus Christ revealed. From this understanding of freedom we were able to hear afresh Paul's epistle to the Galatians. Martyn provided a robust apocalyptic understanding of the epistle that I argued is in alignment with Bonhoeffer's theological vision. In this context we were able to hear Paul's argument that the Galatian church had been set free in the invasive and cosmic Christ event which initiated the new creation within which they were called to live. This new creation is free from the law and anthropocentric religion. The Jerusalem teachers' insistence on keeping the law actually returned the Galatian congregation to living in a false reality of a by-gone era. Instead, Paul encouraged them to live a life of freedom. This life in the Spirit, as Paul calls it, allows those found in Christ to live and act in light of being *in* Christ. And being *in* Christ means being crucified with Christ daily as the church members live *for* others in obedience to God.

This gospel is the clear Yes and No over creation. The Yes is that God has acted on our behalf in Christ's vicarious life, death and resurrection. The movement is completely the initiative of God, whose act in Christ rectifies that which Sin has destroyed. The No is that humanity is totally impotent. Our very breath is dependent on God's grace! The gospel informs human beings that they cannot earn or add to Christ's justifying action on their behalf. It frees the Christian from "religion" and provides vision for the truly free life. However, this justification

rendered upon the human being is made concrete as we are conformed by the Spirit into the form of Christ. The tension between faith and works is dissolved for both these are delivered as the form of Christ becomes real in the individual. Our faith and works are gracious gifts in which we participate solely because of the gracious and free act of God on our behalf.⁴²⁹

Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom is robustly built upon Luther's rediscovery of the gracious gospel. Before embarking on this study I personally struggled in a similar way to that of Luther's early years. I had a covenant understanding of salvation where I found myself living under a law that came from an ecclesial interpretation of scripture. In hindsight, I can see how we as Christians can easily create a "new" law under which we live in response to grace. I have no doubt that the intentions here are pure. However, this allows the church-community to return themselves to a yoke of slavery, and therefore, to lose their true freedom. My time spent with Luther, Bonhoeffer, and Martyn has enabled me to grasp in more fullness Paul's gospel as revealed in the all-encompassing act of God on our behalf. Grace is sufficient and rectifying because God provides the Yes and No over humanity in Christ. My personal faith and Christian ethic was more of an anthropocentric religion; this study has brought correction by revealing the beauty of grace that provides a free and concrete ethic rooted in the contemporaneous Christ. This ethic is located within the Christologically shaped new creation in such a way that free action is formed by the Spirit in accord with the person of Christ.

Our final chapter was a constructive vision for the daily life of the evangelical church in light of our study. We saw that the church-community is called to live humbly before the world. In weakness and powerlessness we witness to the person of Christ

⁴²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6, 142.

who has victory in precisely this manner. The church must also live publicly both in proclamation and witness. We are not called to retreat into pious and ethical idealism but engage the world in its brokenness and mess. This public life must be lived within the Christ ordained mandate of the church and not overstep its calling within the world but boldly witness to the word of God *for* the world. We saw how inviting others into the free action of being *for* others is able to prepare the way for Christ. By allowing others to serve they are able to experience real freedom and therefore become human again. Real freedom is only found in this relational context and is never autonomous. Freedom drives us into community, into the concrete relationships of daily life, where the Spirit shapes our action towards the other in responsible freedom. In this place the world is able to “hear” afresh the gospel of Jesus Christ that is *for* the world. This constructive vision was presented as a possible “new terminology” that Bonhoeffer felt was needed in our post-Christendom culture.

Finally, we discussed the call to obedient life. Bonhoeffer provides a concrete Christian ethic that lives daily in the responsible freedom envisioned by Paul that is neither nomistic nor antinomian. In contrast, Paul envisions a church-community living in light of the cruciform presence of Christ by being *for* others in concrete action. This freedom is for others and the world and found in concrete decisions, relationships, and circumstance. The freedom to live responsibly is found as the Spirit conforms the church-community into the form of Christ in a way that produces fruit in accordance with the form of Christ. This life is lived in the daily reality of the new creation made real by the cosmic Christ event in which God invaded the world to overcome Sin and reconcile all things to himself. Accordingly, the Christian is free to act on behalf of the other trusting that the Spirit is forming this action in line with Christ’s presence. Bonhoeffer’s call to responsibly asks the

Christian to discern the situation, taking seriously the other facing them, and act in accordance to the form of Christ that is being formed in them through the life of the church-community. In the life of the church-community we are formed in a way that grants permission for the venture of free and concrete decision. The Christian understands that they live within the world as God has structured it in Christ and therefore act accordingly.

My thesis has been that Bonhoeffer's theology of freedom offered a concrete daily ethic that is profoundly dependent on Paul's epistle to the Galatians. This understanding of freedom provides a great challenge for the evangelical church (which largely exists within a culture that celebrates an autonomous freedom) to be a witness of the true reality revealed in Christ where life giving freedom is found. The practical implications are ongoing for the church-community. How does this understanding of freedom influence the way we share the gospel to others? How could it alter our proclamation regarding the political and cultural topics of abortion and euthanasia? How does this study affect our use of scripture, or our understanding of the mission of the church in the world? These answers are not easy, but I hope to have provided a starting point for further discussion. There is no doubt that Bonhoeffer and Paul provide a responsible and free ethical vision for the church-community that stands in stark contrast to that of the world. The challenge for the evangelical church is to venture boldly into the world trusting that the Spirit is evoking action and proclamation in accord with the form of Christ becoming real amongst us today. In this way the church-community will witness to the true freedom granted by the gospel, speaking a "terminology" that draws humanity into the rectification already rendered by God in Christ.

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